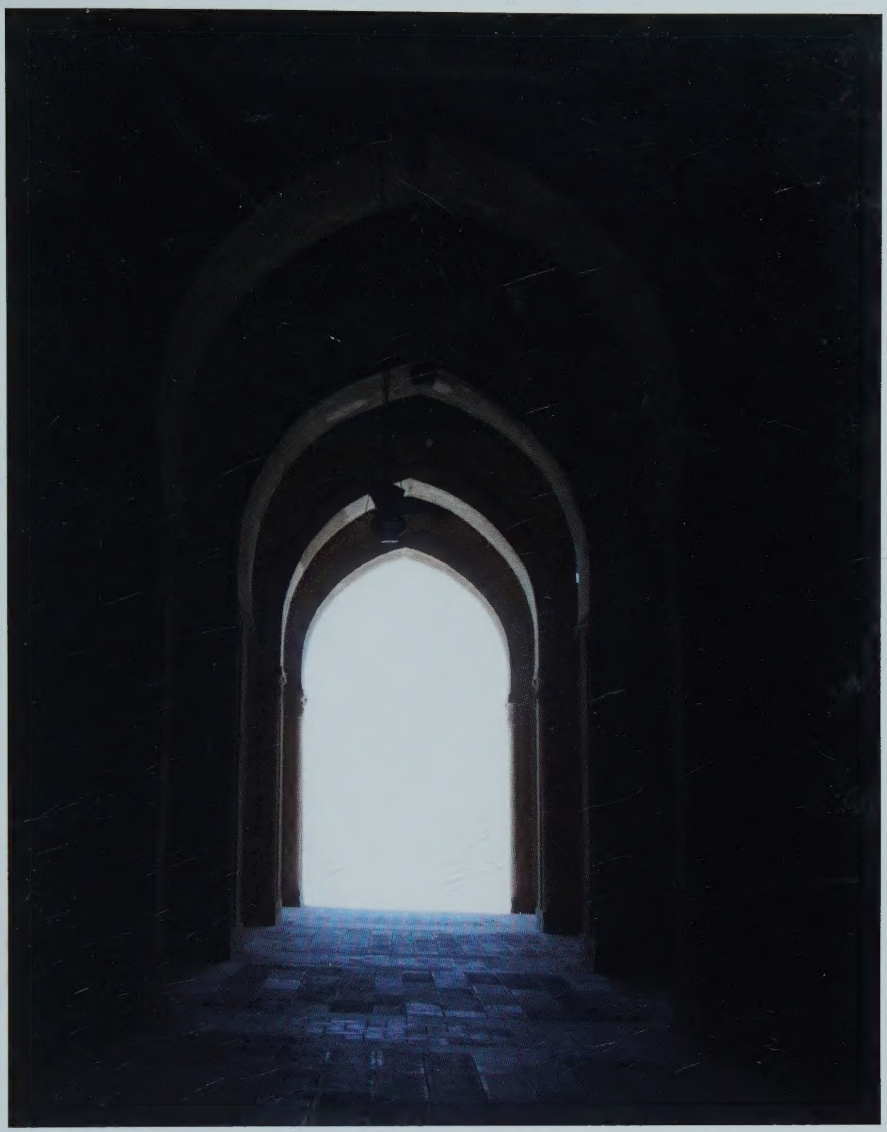

George Meek, Bath Chair-Man; by Himself.

Herbert George Wells, George Meek

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George Meek, Bath Chair-Man; by Himself.

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GEORGE MEEK

BATH CHAIR-MAN

BY HIMSELF

WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY
H. G. WELLS

SECOND IMPRESSION

LONDON
CONSTABLE & CO. LTD.
1910

SONG OF THE CHAIR-MEN

WE do not live, we only starve and linger;
We do not hope, we only drift along;
We have no faith, the years have made us faith-less;
Come! listen to the chair-men's feeble song.

We have no grip on life all things pervading,
We have no cheer but what to-day *may* bring;
There is no love for those who walk in darkness,
Oh! listen while the trailing chair-men sing.

God send us help, or else there is no saviour;
God send us hope, or else we die in pain:
God send us light, or else we blindly falter,
God send us quickly back to sleep again.

Blindly we strive, the vultures gather round us,
Weakly we seek to arm ourselves and stand;
We may not fly, there is no welcome waiting
For such as us in all this teeming land.

We would be men, and do men's work untiring;
We would be free and never know a care;
We would be strong and give for what life giveth,
But Hope lies wounded, dying everywhere.

We would achieve, would quarry stones or build them;
We've but our manhood left to us to save.
Oh! Land of England! is there none to help us?
Is life just this—and presently the grave?

GEORGE MEEK.

INTRODUCTION

THERE are people who will not like this book, just as there are people who will not like its writer. As the little boys say, "Let 'em!" I am a Meek-ite, and know there will soon be other Meek-ites in the world. For them the book is published. Mr. Meek is at once a very typical and a very extraordinary man; he stands for an immense class in the modern community, and he is extraordinary in being able to reveal almost everything he stands for. The reader of books who is also a lover of life will know what I mean. Many thousands of men now-a-days, in every class, trail pens and leave a thread of ink behind them, but it is only here and there that that trail gathers itself together and lives. Mr. Meek does all sorts of dreadful things at times with that pen—there are pages in this book where he will shock even the despicable grammarian—but he writes. Reality is here, told with a frankness that marks the elect. There are no vulgarities of the would-be tactful or would-be genteel, and amazingly few affectations about

Mr. Meek. Considering all his circumstances this is, I think, amazing. There is at moments, beyond all question, the stark simplicity of literary greatness about him. A year ago—it is with real pride I add at my suggestion—he set himself to put himself upon paper, and here he is—self portrayed with quite remarkable success.

I first made Mr. Meek's acquaintance through the post. I do not distinctly remember when he emerged from that welter of generally troublesome correspondence with strangers that is an unavoidable part of an author's life. But I remember I had marked him as a rather queer and interesting correspondent before I realized just what his position in the world might be. I involved myself some years ago in the internal politics of the Socialist movement, and it was in a sort of loose connection with this that he had his beginnings. He burned with a passion for "Socialist Unity"—a thing as probable in this world as theological unanimity—and then I fancy he became personal and self-explanatory. I remember very distinctly that he produced literary projects—of an utterly impossible sort. There was to be a book on Ethics, that difficult subject, and a romantic story of scientific progress. I was no doubt discouraging, but whether civilly or not I have now no means of ascertaining;

usually I am uncivil when I find people who evidently have no special scientific or sociological knowledge propose such undertakings, undertakings simple enough in their way, but still demanding at least that much equipment. And perhaps it was then that I said, "Why, instead of writing about things upon which you are necessarily ignorant, don't you realize that the only thing anybody has any right to produce books about is a personal vision of life? You must know no end of things, and have felt no end of things I, as a writer, would give my left hand for. Try and set them down."

That was a request I repeated much more urgently after I had met Mr. Meek. He came to me in the sunshine at Bank Holiday time, and I did not see him so closely as I would have liked, because by some accident another visitor, also claiming attention strongly, happened to coincide with his call. Mr. Meek is so frank an artist, he has all the shamelessness of the wise, that I will not hesitate to tell him that his appearance shocked and interested me profoundly. He was dressed in ill-fitting black clothes, very dusty with the journey he had made that day, he was awkward in his movements, and there is something in his eyes—I do not know what a specialist would call it—a discoloration of the

whites and a peculiarity of shape that suggests the eye of the blind. One eye, I learn from this book, for the first time, is blind. He peers, walks ill, and does not speak very distinctly. He behaved as the theoretical gentleman behaves, and as no conscious gentleman ever did behave; he neither cringed nor was abashed, self-assertive or gross. He displayed neither abjection nor conceit. He talked simply, as for the most part he writes, about things he understood. He was very full of "Socialist Unity."

You will find in his twenty-seventh chapter an account of this largely pedestrian tour in which he visited me. It is the record of the obscurest of men engaged in the oddest futility, and at the same time it is the record of a profoundly touching dream. Think of the figure of him trudging along the road, with cyclists and motor-cars flying by in the bank-holiday season's rush for pleasure. Meek went to Ashford and met quite several men in a tiny room. He tells how good they were; he came to Folkestone, missing the two or three Hythe stalwarts; he lunched with me after encountering a veteran of the Socialist dawn in Folkestone, and so went on to Dover, where he also found a small knot of men. He is sympathetic but critical. His mission, I say, was a dream. He was pleading

to the miscellaneous to be uniform and to the inquiring and experimental to be unanimous, in order that the Kingdom of Heaven might forthwith arrive. After reading this book you will better understand his impatience. He visited us all as I fancy the apostles must have visited the germinating churches, with clouds of glorious vision in his mind. What did all the weary miles of people in between us matter? What did all the institutions and traditions, the prosperity and substance that made up the world about us, signify to us? Did not we, living in the light of Marx, know the hour was ripe for all these things to pass? They would presently roll back like a curtain, and show the stage new-set for a universal harmony and virtue under the Worker's rule. He was almost serene in spite of his fatigues. We sat in my garden after lunch and smoked and looked out over the sunlit sea and talked of the millennium. (You and I, Meek, will have to be dead a long time and much in our blood and our strain dead for ever, I fear, before there is any millennium.) At last he declared he had to get on; he gave me a peculiar, mysterious handgrip at parting (I wonder if there are secret societies all unsuspect beneath respectable feet to-day), and so went on into the world, a dusty, black, receding figure, full, I

declare, in his peculiar quality, of the spirit of God.

His mission came to nothing tangible. The reader will see that it was but an episode in his life. Yet it was no passing whim that set him afoot upon the roads, but a dream that has touched every one of us who matters now-a-days, and which must needs become more and more significant in human lives as humanity develops.

"Come," says the dream, "this earth is not good enough yet. It is full of stupidities and cruelties, compulsions and hardships. Up and change it, change as much of it as your strength permits." Our answers are absurdly inadequate. Meek goes his pilgrimage through Kent and a part of Sussex, others of us mumble inaudible lectures or hesitate valiant opinions through a book or so. Others again form committees and lose their heads and quarrel with their colleagues. The oddest, most questionable offerings lie before the altar of that dream. It isn't so much a tale of widows' mites as of odd, worn stockings honestly offered, or the ribs of an old umbrella proffered with pride and devotion. . . .

But my business now is not with the dream of Socialism and a millennial world, but with the literary value of Mr. Meek. So far as this book

goes, I put him high among the writers of our time. But then I am a heretic in these things, rather careless of style and elegance, and over-curious, it may be, about life. I want nothing so much as to know how people feel, to get to the red living thing beneath what they have learnt and beneath their instinctive defences. I hate all idealization and all the concealments of idealization. Life is filthy with sentimental lying. I write in a time when that sincere and penetrating treatment of emotion I desire, is fought against and suppressed, when the artist is bidden abandon his attempts to mirror life, and go make beautiful pasteboard masks for the vanity of dullness and the discretions of the timid. Every man who would tell of reality does it at his personal cost amidst a chorus of abuse. I suppose to the very end of things, the writer who matters must take as his endorsement and burthen the hysterical cruelty and injustice of the shocked and the virulently-inflicted injuries of the honestly indignant. "In other words," as Crumpher used to say, I have my doubts if the new censorship of the libraries, which is to do so great a work in protecting the British home from the inconvenience of ideas, will tolerate Mr. Meek. No—there is that lapse into gaiety of his "Other Loves," and "On Going to the Devil," and the

scandalous defence of beer-drinking. It will be too much!

It is interesting, with this real bath chair-man's life before us, to speculate about the sort of bath chair-man's autobiography that would be tolerated. It would be written, of course, by some clever woman accustomed to district visiting. Its hero must have none of the painful irregularities of origin to which Mr. Meek confesses, and his appalling cynicisms about the clergy and boys' brigades would be replaced by a manly confidence in these agencies for good. He would struggle in early life to support his widowed mother, and the physical incapacities which made him a chair-propeller would be caused in an heroic effort to save the favourite dog of some reader of the *Spectator* from a fire. The chair attained, he would become the respectful admirer, the occasional involuntary eavesdropper of its occupants. He would conceive a mute and altogether touching adoration for a beautiful invalid girl, his customer, which would flash into generous sympathy when her handsome and perfectly correct lover—kept at arm's length, alas! by the girl's irrevocable promise made carelessly to a maiden aunt—appeared. The bulk of the book would develop their restrained and altogether commendable pas-

sion—the young man would go away to a war, and get injured in some manner consonant with the dictates of good taste—and the closing scenes would give us the marriage, the maiden aunt having not only released the girl from her promise, but foreshadowed a legacy. Perhaps even the story might go on—for there is a kind of boldness possible now-a-days even in desirable novels—in the bath chair-man saying that only yesterday he was privileged to see from a respectful distance his dear young lady's baby—"and a beautiful baby it was." Such a book is calculated to strengthen the mind of the imperial citizen and intensify understanding between class and class.

But how different and disorganizing is Mr. Meek! He not only declines to act as chorus to his customers, but he is almost brutally indifferent to their important concerns. Instead, he tells of concerns of his own. In place of the respectful sentimentalities becoming in one in his position, he adventures upon squalid eroticisms—as Mr. St. Loe Strachey might say—on his own private and personal account. He refuses absolutely to be aware of those admirable *Letters to a Working Man*, at once manly and persuasive in tone, grammatical in construction, and interesting in matter, with which the editor

of the *Spectator* wrought little short of a revolution in proletarian thought. So far as Mr. Meek's incursion into literary and sociological criticism goes, such valuable specimens of contemporary mentality might never have been written. His attempts to form a chair-man's union flew in the face of the most venerable laws of political economy, and were—to give them no worse á condemnation—highly disrespectful to everything a prosperous Englishman holds dear. . . .

I do but jest when I write of these conspiracies of moribund minds obliterating Mr. Meek. He has produced a living work that will defy the embargo of Mr. Mudie and all the libraries. How living it is! Could anything be more touching than the hunger for life, and the zest in life, confessed in this poor, halting body? Here is a voice, unmusical perhaps, and half choked by the grime and disorder from which it speaks, yet proclaiming the inexhaustible interest of existence. It is impossible to read the book and doubt that Mr. Meek has found life richly worth the living. In that acceptance, and the simplicity that arises out of it, lie his claim to a place in the republic of literature. He soars above the common herd by virtue of his shamelessness. The common man will not have life at

any price. He must dress it, hide it, evade it, stop his ears to it, and scream and shriek. The common man humbugs himself, humbugs every one, goes through his allotted span a timidity and a pretence—to fulfil the mysterious purposes of God unknowingly. But Mr. Meek can tell, unaffectedly and finely, such a story as his love for Ruth, or that cruel moment when he presents himself before his American cousin. Those two passages took me by the throat. I want no made-up stories while I can read things like that. He has no vulgar eagerness to forget these things. He tells his bitter humiliation—and prevails over it.

His style seems to me extraordinarily clear and simple; he has a curious knack of giving detail that fixes his pictures. If he lapses into such a vulgarity as to write about a "number nine smile," it's a mere momentary slip into the dialect of his habitual reading. Like all real living things, he's better than his food. . . .

It chanced that a friend of Mr. Meek's received the MS. as he packed for a week-end at a great country house, and this story got itself oddly intercalated with the talk and presence of viceroys and ministers and great ladies. It was a queer experience to finish one's dressing, tie one's tie, adjust the fine carnation which it

is the pleasant custom of that house to impose, and sit down very bright and clean in a chintz-covered chair before the fire to snatch ten minutes of Meek before dinner. It set a curious undertone going in one's thoughts. One talked of this and that, was served by dexterous butlers and footmen, admired the silver and flowers of the splendid table, and there in the shadows was Meek—Meek with as fine an appetite as any of us, as capable, for all his want of training, of as subtle appreciations, Meek like a frog in the dustbin. Meek hovered all next day, a shimmer in the sunshine, a darkness under the trees. It was impossible to avoid comparisons. Meek would have made a very passable, and perhaps quite unusually expressive, peer. I think he is nobler than most peers—but I write in the heat of a feverish election. His friend found his sleep disturbed at night by the riddle, "What are we to do with our Meeks"? He tried it, he says, upon a duchess and a viceroy and a party whip. The problem played about the Sunday's dinner-table, but got no hint of a solution.

"What to do with our Meeks?" I find creeping into the revised proofs of this book, a rather touching belief on our author's part that those excellent and energetic people who are now setting out to "Break up the Poor

Law," will make things mysteriously better for Meek and his kind. There is going to be a wonderful new organization, devised with obscure assistance by Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb, that will "do everything." Among other things there are to be certain "Detention Colonies of a reformatory type"; and a careful perusal of the publications of the Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission, side by side with Mr. Meek's confessions, leaves me with an uncomfortable feeling that that is about where Mr. Meek would fall under the new order of things. At one point in his chequered career Mr. Meek ceased for a time to be known by his proper name and became D 12. He then interviewed a prison governor and a number of warders and formed an unfavourable impression. Exactly the same class of men will supply the rank and file of the officials in the "Detention Colony of a reformatory type." They will be supplemented, no doubt, by intelligent persons drawn from among the active spirits in that political club with which his relations became strained. On the whole I think Mr. Meek will not only be happier, but socially more profitable, scribbling his impressions of our enigmatical and still largely unreformed universe during a phase of "discontinuous employment." I am

afraid, in spite of his sanguine note, that the Minority Report is no effective solution of the riddle of what to do with our Meeks.

Meanwhile, Mr. Meek has decided what to do with himself, and has sampled life for the intelligent reader at a level at which I do not think it has ever been sampled with any vividness before. And what a horrible state of affairs it is, this unavoidably dingy, unavoidably dirty, pinched insecurity! When I think of this man's brain going in the midst of that life, and going with a certain undeniable fineness, fearing, hoping, rejoicing, whetting itself upon occasional books, getting hold of the extensive theorizing of Socialism, arguing about fate and politics with the other chair-men on the rank, sitting down in a comfortless room to that projected work on Ethics, with a copying-ink pencil and a blue-ruled penny exercise book, I am amazed at the unconquerable pertinacity of the literary spirit.

Mr. Meek has convinced me that human life means to get itself stated, and that nothing can gag it. For after all, wherever our lot or our quality takes us writers, our business is to state life—and for us, when that is done, then everything is done.

H. G. Wells.

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GEORGE MEEK

BATH CHAIR-MAN

CHAPTER I

BIRTH, PARENTAGE AND EARLY DAYS

I WAS born in a small cottage in East Street, Eastbourne, just behind the "Rose and Crown" public-house, on Whit Monday, June 1, 1868. My father's family was of Scottish descent. It had, I understand, migrated from Inverness to Leith and from Leith to Hastings. Here my father was born, the youngest but one of a large family.

His father appears to have earned a precarious livelihood by gathering, cutting and polishing agates. These are to be found on the southern beaches, and some of them are, I believe, of considerable value. There was formerly a very good collection of them at the Wish Tower Museum in Eastbourne, but that has been transferred to the Technical Institute in Grove Road.

I do not remember my father nor any mem-

ber of his family. My grandfather Meek was, I should say, one of those people who hoard up their money for a time and then make ducks and drakes of it. My mother used to say I "took after" him. I may do, so far as the "ducks and drakes" are concerned, but I certainly do not with respect to the hoarding. Once when a lad I saved my pence for some time until a curious money-box, which my mother had sent me from America, should have contained at least five shillings, but when I went to it one day I found it empty. My bank had "suspended payment," and I have never felt tempted to save money since.

My father had four brothers and a sister. Two or three of the brothers joined the Royal Navy, which they deserted to settle in the Colonies or the U.S.A. The youngest brother became, like my father, a plasterer, and, like the Atridæ, they married two sisters. The remarkable opening up of the country caused by the introduction of railroads gave a great impetus to the building trade. Fashionable watering places sprang up like mushrooms where previously only small fishing towns and villages had been. Amongst these Hastings and Eastbourne were of the earliest to benefit: to which fact is due the circumstance that my father,

coming from Hastings to Eastbourne in the course of his employment, met my mother.

She came of an entirely different stock. He was probably descended from wild highlandmen and predatory Norse (Björnson has two or three characters named "Meek" in one of his books—*In God's Way*), but she came of a family of peasants from the English Midlands. My father was very tall; she was very short and slight, with nearly black hair, blue eyes, a large nose and a gay but uncertain temper; an active, restless little woman; very clean, but full of whims and always chattering. A clean housewife, though a bad manager, unable to take care of money.

She was the youngest of three sisters. The other two, one of whom married my father's youngest brother, died while I was very young. I remember neither of them, but one of them left a son, who was brought up with me until I was twelve years old. He was four and a half years older than I was. These three sisters had lost their mother when they were quite young, and their father—my grandfather—had married again, giving them as step-mother a woman who had been betrayed in her young days and had a son. No children were born of my grandfather's second marriage.

He was a native of Finmer, a small village

on the borders of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. In his young days, while employed in London, he had taught himself to read and write. Later he had been in some sort of service under the last Duke of Buckingham at Stowe House, Buckinghamshire, but in what capacity I do not know. There used to be a good deal of talk of poachers and poaching, so I should say he was either an under-gamekeeper or one of their natural enemies—a poacher himself.

When the Duke of Buckingham died there was a great sale at Stowe House, at which, I have heard my grandfather say, a Lord Rothschild outbid the late Queen Victoria for a valuable bedstead. He himself bought some old Windsor chairs from the kitchen, which, with their brightly burnished brass crests—consisting of a sheaf of wheat surmounted by a crown and surrounded by a motto—were among the most familiar objects of my early childhood. When, in after years, my grandmother died and left them to me with the rest of her furniture, being out of work I was glad of the fancy price they fetched.

My mother's family came to the neighbourhood of Eastbourne from Buckinghamshire with a farmer named Paxton, who had taken a farm at Willingdon. Here they occupied an old

flint cottage which stood upon the corner of the main road and Church Street where "Flint House" now stands. Leaving Mr. Paxton's service after a time my grandfather entered that of another farmer named Reid at Jevington. Here he did some poaching. My grandmother has often spoken of burying fur and feathers to elude the search of their cottage made for them by gamekeepers. Butcher's meat was scarce and dear in the country in those days. I do not suppose my grandfather's wages were very high. There were three growing girls to be kept, and doubtless an occasional hare or partridge was acceptable.

At this period the countryside was frequented by a "natural" named Mike, an eccentric character of whom a few anecdotes may be given. Asked one day by the village parson which he would have, a half-crown or a half-sovereign, he answered, "I won't be greedy, I'll take the little one." He used to hawk brimstone matches—which he made himself. One day he had lit a fire in a lane to melt the brimstone when a farmer who was passing by kicked it out. Mike hawked his matches without the brimstone, telling the cottagers who complained that he couldn't help it: Jemmy Reid had kicked his fire out. When his mother died (under, I pre-

sume, some hedgerow) the overseers of the parish in which it happened gave him half-a-crown to carry her body into the next parish, and when she was buried he laid her shawl on her grave "to keep her warm."

At Jevington at that time lived a girl who had been born without arms. She was a schoolfellow of my mother, who said that when they were playing some kind of game with a ball "she would kick her slipper off and hit the hall with her foot." When she was married she signed the register with her toes. She was shown doing this in a contemporary illustrated paper. Afterwards she kept her house clean and washed and dressed her children when they were born with her feet, but she kept her cottage door locked so that no one should see how it was done. She is, I believe, still living in Eastbourne.

About 1862 my grandfather moved into Eastbourne, where he entered the employment of James Peerless the builder, as a carter. He stayed with him twelve years, receiving eighteen shillings per week wages. In '66 or '67 my father and mother became acquainted and were married.

When I was born I had such bright blue eyes (like my mother's) that she very foolishly

exposed them too much to the light. Consequently I caught a cold in them, which turning to inflammation I became, for a time, quite blind. I was taken to Guy's Hospital and the Ophthalmic at Moorfields, and in time recovered the sight of one of them. That of the other was irretrievably lost. My mother said that the optic nerve was destroyed; but as there appears to be neither pupil nor iris, and it is without any sense of light or darkness, I should say the whole eye has gone. So that I have been heavily handicapped from the very beginning.

I ran the gauntlet of the usual number of childish complaints: scarlatina, scarlet-fever, measles and so forth, which, as I was very fragile and there was neither a local sanatorium nor the present-day advance in sanitation nor medical knowledge, was surprising.

I do not remember my mother at this time nor my father at all. There was a slump in the building trade in Eastbourne in the winter of '70–'71, and he, with many others, was thrown out of work. For a time he appears to have been engaged upon relief work, breaking flints on the Grand Parade. A fellow plasterer, who is now a bath chair-man, has spoken to me of working with him there. However, he raised the money somehow to emigrate to America,

where he obtained employment at his trade in Brooklyn, New York, a week after landing.

He was, I should say, a good mechanic. He did the mouldings on the ceilings in the reception-rooms in the older part of the Cavendish Hotel, and for years afterwards we had a large medallion in plaster of Shakespeare which he made.

My mother followed him shortly afterwards. She made the voyage in a sailing ship, and it occupied fourteen weeks. A younger brother of mine, whom she took with her, died soon after they got to America. I was left behind with my grandfather and grandmother, who were both much attached to me, and who feared, as I was so delicate, I should not stand the voyage or the change of climate.

My very earliest recollection is of my first day at school. If I am to believe my mother, I was only two and a half years old. But I remember the occasion distinctly. We sat on low benches on a low sloping "gallery" in the morning and in the afternoon I remember the teacher chalking the figures 1 to 9 on the blackboard.

I dimly remember my "uncle Charlie," the son my grandmother had before marriage, and I distinctly remember his wife, a sensuous

woman with long dark curls. They had a talking magpie which they took to Ohio with them.

The pair had no children when they left England. In America they had a son, who was christened "Prince Otto" after a character in either *The Farmer of Inglewood Forest* or *The Children of the Abbey*—I do not know which, as I have read neither of them.

My home life during this period was very happy. My grandparents were very good to me, and although we were poor we never knew what it was to want. My grandmother went out to work occasionally, but not, I think, regularly. I can remember her at a laundry in Cavendish Place, where I was anxious to turn the mangle; but I remember more distinctly her lace-making. She had a "pillow" and boxes of "bobbins," and with these she made excellent hand lace. She told me in after years that she used to sit on the beach in front of the Grand Parade with this work in the summer time and that she found some good customers for it among the passing gentry. I remember that one day she went over the rocks close to the Wish Tower to gather limpets, and that she fell and cut her face dreadfully. Also, about this time, I had some kind of formation growing above my left eye which

had to be plastered up, and my grandfather made a final plaster with cobbler's wax which was most difficult and painful to remove.

Part of the time we lived in a little two-roomed cottage in a yard, or "close," off Grove Road. This has since been demolished. Here, I remember, my grandfather brought out his gun and shot some starlings, which he had, baked in a pie, for supper. I think I must have been left by myself a great deal, or at most with my cousin, a lad who at that time could not have been more than seven or eight years old. There are recollections of lonely meals I ate, of no care except from him, of long evenings spent waiting for grandfather and grandmother to come home.

They always came home sober. I do not remember seeing my grandfather the worse for drink except on one occasion, and that was on a Christmas Day. He had a glass or two of ale every day, but I gather that he never exceeded. My grandmother was never addicted to drink. She was careful, fond of her home, making no silly pretentions, but just anxious to live a quiet, comfortable life. One anecdote I recall with reference to her at this time. She had bought a new pair of boots at a local shop on a Saturday night. On Sunday she and

grandfather went for a walk along the sands, and the soles of her new boots fell off!

She loomed very large in my early days. When she was at home I spent most of my out-of-school hours with her. When I was sick—I remember only one occasion, when I had the measles—she nursed me, giving me, by the doctor's orders, port wine, a drink which I preferred very much to the nasty medicine. For some years afterwards whenever I felt I wanted something particularly nice I complained of feeling ill, and begged for more port wine. Then I had trouble with my teeth, which she tried to relieve by rubbing my gums with coarse salt.

Also there were warm baths and shower baths, the latter administered by means of a garden watering-pot; nauseous castor-oil every now and then; pennies for sweets, which were often spent in children's books. Of these I acquired quite a large collection, and my grandfather bound them into one large volume. I suppose I could not read very well at that time, as I used to get him, when I bought a new book, to read it to me.

The last year or two of our stay in Eastbourne we occupied three back rooms in a house in Cross Street, for which, I understand, my people paid four shillings and sixpence per week.

While we were there the notable fire at Peerless' yard occurred.

It was my habit on fine days, though I was very young, to go up and meet my grandfather in the evening when his work was done. I believe I spent much of my spare time with him. I remember going to the brick-yards with him, where I used to watch him load his cart with bricks. He put on his hands a pair of leather things like gloves with no backs to them. Then a man would throw bricks to him, three at a time, from a large stack; these he caught, piling them in his cart.

It was amusing when I walked home with him to hear the tramp, tramp of his great hob-nailed boots and the pitter, patter of my little ones. On the night of the fire I went up to the yard in Langney Road as usual. Here I saw young Mr. Peerless, the son of the proprietor, and, looking round at the great stacks of timber, I remarked to him, in my wisdom, "You will have a fire here one of these nights." I think my cousin Harry had set our own kitchen chimney on fire with sawdust and shavings a night or two before, which, I suppose, suggested the idea to me. At all events the place *did* catch fire that night. My grandfather was called out of bed to get the horses out of the stable, and I

saw the smoking ruins the next morning. It was, I believe, the largest fire Eastbourne has ever known. The yard where it occurred—at present occupied by Peerless, Dennis and Co.—abuts on a brewery, and fearing it might spread the owners of the latter had all the wines, beers and spirits taken from the cellars and placed in the open street in Lismore Road, where the militia or the volunteers were called upon to guard them. The people in the opposite houses in Langney Road hung wet blankets out of their windows to keep their houses from catching fire.

I do not remember much of my school life during these years. I attended the infant school in Meads Road, which was founded by a lady member of the Cavendish family, for a time, and those attached to Trinity Church and Christ Church. From the latter—a little flint box which stands in the churchyard—I one day played truant, taking our landlady's children with me to gather blackberries on the Crumbles. Our landlady gave me a hiding, the first I ever remember having. I was not six years old, and the blackberries were green!

There were many Sunday excursions with my own people. One to Willingdon, by a footpath where Upperton Road now stands. Arrived at

the pretty cottage of an aunt and uncle at that village, a cottage which stood on a bank, behind a garden full of bright flowers, we had a grand country dinner of boiled bacon, potatoes, broad beans, and pudding, which I know I, for one, enjoyed. Then there were long walks to see "Earp's Mansion," a big new house built without chimneys by a Buckinghamshire gentleman who, I have been told, had made a great deal of money by running the blockade from Richmond during the American civil war, with three shiploads of cotton. This house is now called "The Cliff," and has been used for some years as a ladies' school. The same gentleman built the original Grand Hotel, which was, for some years, a failure.

Also I remember seeing the Devonshire Park and Baths while the former was being laid out and the latter built. There was no parade beyond the Wish Tower to the west or the Albion Hotel to the east in those days. Where the residential west ward is now built used to be farm land. The working class "Marsh" quarter was marsh land, meadows in which we gathered sorrel and floated along the intersecting ditches upon mortar-boards. No houses should have been built upon the land or upon the still more swampy soil farther east, but the interests of

private property owners outweigh those of public health.

In these meadows, close to where we lived, there used sometimes to be swings and roundabouts, and sometimes circuses. Then, once a year, there was the Guy Fawkes procession, a glorious, exciting event with many torches and fireworks, some of the latter dangerously virile. And there was always the beach. I do not remember ever being hungry or cold, ill-shod or ill-clothed during these years; they were, I believe, very happy ones indeed. I think I could read and write "print" before I was six years old. At any rate I wrote some letters to my mother in America in that way during this time. I do not remember being beaten or caned at any of the infant schools I attended in Eastbourne. During her first year at school my little daughter, aged then five, came home with her hands so badly beaten she could not bear any one to touch them, so that it appears the treatment of school children has not improved so very greatly.

In 1874, when I was six years old, my grandfather gave up his place at Peerless the builder's and took service as ploughman with a farmer named Edwards at Jevington, a village five miles over the hills and seven miles by road from Eastbourne.

Before leaving this part of my life I have one episode to record. The builder Peerless, by whom my grandfather was employed, obtained the contract to build a new workhouse at Chailey, a small village in mid-Sussex. My grandfather and uncle Charlie, the sawyer, were employed upon it. They took me with them. I do not remember either going or returning to this place, but I remember that we slept in a ground-floor room, which smelt of new wood and fresh paint, in a finished part of the building, and that there was great difficulty in finding water. A well was being bored and it had to be carried very deep. I saw the men descending, two at a time, one on each side of what looked like a long section of water-pipe, with two transverse bars, upon one of which they stood while they held on by the other, which was above their heads.

CHAPTER II

BOYHOOD IN THE COUNTRY

My grandfather was allowed the use of a farm wagon to remove our furniture from Eastbourne to Jevington. This, drawn by three huge brown horses, whose names I subsequently learned were "Cubit, Captain, and Smiler," caused me great wonder. It had no "tail-board" at the back, simply a wooden bar across the top from side to side, and at the bottom a roller, through two holes in which long loose pegs were passed. This, I learned afterwards, was used when the wagon was loaded very high (with hay or corn, for instance) to tighten the ropes which were passed over it from the front. The horses were gay with much jingling, brightly burnished brass about their harness, and blue, red, and yellow ribbons on their bridles.

I, my grandmother and my cousin Harry rode on top of the furniture. I do not remember much of the journey, except that when we had passed Wannock Glen my cousin got down and gathered a large bunch of primroses for me, so it must have been in the early spring. It is

curious how little incidents of this kind are retained in the memory. I can see him now, a rough-clad little boy, handing the big bunch of yellow flowers up to me as I sat on the wagon.

When we reached our little cottage we found there was no fire-grate in it. A broken one was borrowed. This had to be kept upright with two or three loose bricks. It had originally been a four-legged affair, but two of the legs had been broken off. We made shift with this for a time until a new one was bought. When my grandmother wanted to make a cake for Sunday's tea, and was not using the large brick oven in the washhouse, she baked it by placing it under the grate with a sheet of tin over it to keep the ashes from falling into it. This cottage can still be seen. It stands on the right, just inside the upper end of the village, opposite a large barn.

They found that my cousin Harry was not needed, so they sent him into the workhouse. But he was not there long. My grandfather, much to my delight, fetched him out to be his ploughboy. Poor Harry never had much education.

The next few years are crowded with memories and impressions. My school life was an eventful one. The village school was managed by a retired naval man and his daughter, assisted by

a pupil teacher. A great stickler for the Church and Church teaching, he soon initiated me into its meaning. I found that while the children of one or two well-to-do people were screened and pampered, the portion of the cottager's child was mostly knocks. Although I was scarcely seven years old, I was punished daily. The great trouble was my writing. Somehow I could not acquire the graceful sloping style similar to that used in engravings which was expected of us. Consequently my young head was the constant recipient of hard blows from the school-master's black ruler, and I was so frequently caned that my hands became too sore to hold the pen. I remember one occasion very well. I had a severe cold in my eyes, and could scarcely distinguish the lines upon which I was supposed to write; everything appeared as through a thick mist. This, however, did not screen me from punishment. I felt so bitterly the injustice meted out to me that I went home and complained to my grandfather. He was so angry that, meeting the school-master in the street, he threatened to thrash him, and he would not let me go to school again for some months. Finally the school-attendance officer intervened and made peace between them.

On the first day of my return to school the

pedagogue assembled the whole of the children and gave them a long address about me and my wickedness. Most impressively he assured them that he should detail the incident in his "log book"!

I do not remember much else of my school days there except that the daughter was almost as unkind to me as the father. She afterwards married the farmer for whom my grandfather worked; at that time he had a housekeeper who had a son—a fair-haired boy—who was my first great friend. We were inseparable. Whatever mischief was afoot at our end of the village we were in it—generally the ringleaders. Occasionally the farmer would have a nephew or two staying with him—I suppose they must have been well-to-do: they were always well-dressed and always had plenty of pocket-money. We tolerated them, but though they were glad to join in our games, we did not fail to let them know we could do without them. We had our own group at our end of the village. There were more children at the other end with whom we occasionally fraternized, but we were better dressed than most of them. Not that our friends were better off, only that they looked after us better.

On December 6, 1876, my grandfather received

a telegram from Brooklyn, N.Y., saying that a theatre had been burnt down, and my father had been one of the audience. Shortly afterwards a letter in a black-bordered envelope came from my mother. My grandfather was thrashing oats with a flail in one of the barns. I was sent to him with it, and directly he saw it he broke down and cried like a child, for my father had been killed in the fire. He died actually from heart disease, to which he was subject, so my mother was told, but he was badly burnt; afterwards it was only by his watch that he was identified. He is buried in Evergreen Cemetery, New York. I suppose, on the whole, he must have been a steady man. My mother used to speak of a terrible wickedness he was guilty of. While living in Eastbourne he ran up a beer score at the "Brighton Arms," then popularly known as "Billy Horne's," and sometimes in America he would go on the spree, causing her great anxiety on account of the brutality of the police, who in the Land of Freedom are very free on occasion with their clubs. One night in Brooklyn he came home with his overcoat turned inside out "to keep it dry." However, he could not have been so very bad, as at the time of his death he had worked up a small business as a contracting plasterer, and had four or five men

working for him. I should say he was a studious man, as when my mother returned to England she brought a large number of technical works on building construction and architecture with her which he had left. I think he must have done well, as she lived for over six months afterwards in Brooklyn, and had enough left to pay her passage home and land with a considerable quantity of baggage and some money.

Her return was the occasion of my first great disappointment. I looked forward for weeks to the happiness of meeting her and my two brothers, longing to have a mother and brothers like other children. But when she came I soon discovered that all her affections were centred in her other children, and I was left out in the cold. She hated me for being nearly blind, and because my grandfather and grandmother thought so much of me.

The two sons she brought home with her, one of them four years old, the other a few months, had been born in America. She had eight children in all, four of whom died, one in England, three in America.

I remember her home-coming. It was in the summer. They drove up from Polegate station with my grandfather, who had gone to meet them in a wagonette. They were very cross

and tired, and when I wanted to be affectionate I was repelled. She lived with us for some time, but she and my grandmother began to quarrel, and she took a small two-roomed cottage at the lower end of the village. Her money being spent, she applied for parish relief, which she supplemented with what she could earn as a dressmaker.

She was still quite young—under thirty years of age. I am afraid she "showed off" her Yankee accent and phrases rather amongst the villagers. I remember her as being sometimes kind to me, sometimes otherwise. She suffered considerably with sick-headaches.

My life during these years—from the age of six to nine—was, in spite of the cruel schoolmaster, and latterly of motherly frowns, very happy. I took a keen interest in everything about me. Our cottage was small, but sufficient. A little white-washed four-roomed place with leaded windows. The two lower rooms had brick floors. The front room was covered with thick coker-nut matting. In the back room, the "wash-house," was a large oven, in which my grandmother baked bread and cakes twice a week. She also made ginger-beer, which she sold to passers-by and the village children, with sweets and biscuits. She said that I ate all the

profits. The oven was heated by burning huge bundles of furze in it.

Our next-door neighbours were the village blacksmith's two brothers, who lived with their mother and sister. These were fairly well-to-do people who kept bees, and often gave me honey in the comb and fruit.

On the other side was a large orchard, the happy hunting-ground of the village lads in autumn, as its owner lived nearly half a mile away.

In the autumn and winter my grandfather would go rabbit-shooting (he had the farmer's permission to do so over some downland), and often brought six or eight brace home with him, but I never remember seeing him with a partridge or pheasant, or even a hare. He was fond of animals, of his horses and our domestic pets, which consisted of a tabby cat, a blackbird, a goldfinch, and a number of tame rabbits. The cottage had about ten rods of garden attached. This ran down the side, the larger part given over to vegetables, but a long slip of it under a wall contained, among other things, flowers the seeds of which had been sent us from Ohio. This was my grandmother's special care. One year we tried to grow some Indian corn, but though it grew very high and the ears developed,

it never fully ripened. People passing in carriages would often stop to buy a bunch of flowers. My grandmother insisted always that only sweet-smelling ones were worth having, consequently in the summer her garden scented the whole place. There was a pear tree, the special resting-place, I used to think, of our cat, and in the wall, serving the two houses, a well, from the depths of which the buckets sometimes brought up bright-coloured lizards with the water. These neighbours once gave me so much honey it made me ill; too ill to go to school—so ill, indeed, that I loathed peppermint drops and regarded brandy balls as a delusion and a snare. And I had not been ill for years—as a boy counts.

About this time a new family of working people came to live at our end of the village. There were many children, among them a girl of ten or eleven, who became at once in a childish way, and afterwards in fact, "the village flirt," *à la* Rabelais. She was the first girl of this description I ever met, but not by any means the last. They are a class to themselves among women. They are not "led astray," as the orthodox novel would have us believe; they lead others from the paths of virtue. Although I always went to mixed schools, and out of school-

hours the boys and girls fraternized in their play to a very great extent, she was the only specimen of this type I knew as a child. With this exception: though the girls would romp with us, join freely in our games and our excursions after nuts, berries, or flowers, their behaviour towards us and ours towards them was perfectly free from any taint of impropriety.

Such women, however carefully they are guarded, and to whatever class they belong, will find a way to give expression to their individuality sooner or later. George Moore, in *A Drama in Muslin*, portrays one of them who had been carefully brought up in a convent, and that author does not, I believe, usually exaggerate in the delineation of character. I have met and heard and read of numerous individual women of this kind in various classes of society. In them an abnormal development of the sex sense in maturity appears to follow upon its premature manifestation.

I think she struck a jarring note in my life, although it had little effect upon my conception of women generally. I suppose I have to thank what little strain of poetry there is in my temperament for the fact that from my earliest years I have always been given to idealizing the fair sex. Although my experience leads me to con-

clude that I am mistaken, I always like to think of them as being but a little lower than the angels.

My experience has led me to divide women into three classes. First, the merely animal, carried away by their lusts, from which the majority of prostitutes are recruited. Second, the merely superficial, concerned with nothing but their daily round of duties and their neighbours' affairs. This forms a large class; they are the supporters of penny novelettes; they have no ideal beyond a fine frock or a new hat. The third comprises the refined, visionary women of high ideals who attempt and do things; women like Julia Dawson, Margaret MacMillan, and Mabel Hope. You can scarcely ever interest the first or second class in politics.

I was then nine years of age, and I suppose those whose children are watched over by trained nurses and governesses of unimpeachable respectability would be horrified were I to tell just simply and plainly all that was done by us little children, and just all the range of knowledge our talk covered. No doubt it was all very dreadful, but I think such premature experience is far commoner among poor children—that is to say, among the mass of the population—than many delicate-minded people are disposed to believe.

It smirched me, no doubt; technically, I was "corrupted," but on the whole, as I try to recall the phases of my subsequent development, I am bound to confess I think it injured me but little. It didn't a bit prevent my falling into the purest and tenderest love when my time came for that. Perhaps it made its purity possible.

The life on the farm interested me very much. When we first went there, all the operations—sowing, mowing, reaping and threshing were carried out by hand. I saw the steam-plough introduced, the horse-drill, the mowing and reaping-machines, and the complicated steam-thresher. These were, of course, great wonders to me. The harvest field was a source of never-ending fun, the hiding in "shocks," helping to bind the sheaves, or gleaning. Afterwards came the blackberrying and nutting. On the whole, I think the life of a country child is much more interesting than that of one in the town. In this village none of the other children were unkind to me. Previously in the town, though I was very little, the boys used to chase me, calling me "Blind-eyes." The same thing happened when I returned to Eastbourne later. I was afraid to pass a Sunday-school crowd, because I was certain to be assailed by derisive cries on account of my sight. It may be that in the

countryside the children feel more easily criticism and observation than they do in that wilderness of strangers the town.

I think I have written all that is worth telling of my experiences in this first village.

My life at Jevington, as it appears to me now in the retrospect, was made up principally of mischief and pleasure. The joy of life was strong in me: I took great interest in the riding of bare-backed horses—more than one of which threw me—and upon loads of wheat to the miller's or the nearest railway-station. Once we went into Eastbourne for a load of gravel. My grandfather, with the other men, stopped at a roadside public-house, the "Archery Tavern," for lunch (commonly called "bait" amongst them). They had beer, and when one of them asked me what I would have (*ætat* eight!), I said "Brandy"!

I continued to be a great reader. Our library was a limited one, consisting at first, if I remember rightly, of Hume's *History of England*, another school history, and Sturm's *Reflections*. To this my people subsequently added an illustrated family Bible, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Holy War*, which they bought in monthly parts. The latter I read with avidity again and again, little thinking that one of the tinker's

descendants was to play a very important part in my own life.

After my mother's return from America, our people, at her request, bought what at that time was called "Book" tea. You bought so many pounds of tea, and then you received a book in return for the coupons attached to each package. In this way I became acquainted with Diprose's Annual, 1876–77, *Robinson Crusoe*, and the *Swiss Family Robinson;* the latter was my favourite amongst them all.

But alas! and alas! my happy days—happy in spite of canings and motherly frowns—were numbered. My grandfather quarrelled with the farmer for whom he worked at Jevington, and taking service with another over the hills in a neighbouring village, had only been with him three weeks when he died of bronchitis, aged fifty-nine.

His death was a great blow to me. He had been always, if anything, too kind to me. He more than filled the place of my father, whom I never remember seeing. I was very greatly attached to him, and delighted to be with him in the fields, or going to Polegate with him on a load of corn. Sometimes I would wander away by myself among the hedgerows or over the lonely South Downs seeking new natural curiosi-

ties in the way of flowers, berries, or fungi. Once, being very hungry, I ate several of these fungi, and was fearfully sick. Out of school, within reasonable limits, I was allowed to do pretty much as I liked. Under the hills, just beyond the old Church, there used to be a plantation of wild raspberries. Here, one day, a badger was found, and the hunt which followed threw the village into great excitement.

CHAPTER III

LATER SCHOOLDAYS

AFTER my grandfather's death my mother and grandmother lived together for two years and a half at Willingdon. We were very poor, I remember. There was no regular income apart from some small relief from the parish and my cousin's earnings as a carter boy, which were not great.

Occasionally my grandmother did a day's washing or charing. My mother set up in business as a dressmaker, but I am afraid she did not prosper greatly. My grandfather had been paid sixteen shillings a week. In addition he had a cottage rent free. This had ensured us a regular, if plain living. It was, I remember, very plain. I grew up thin and delicate. They could scarcely ever persuade me to touch meat of any kind, and prophesied frequently that I should never live to be twenty-one. It is a mistake to prophesy unless you know, because, thin and delicate as I was then, I am now over forty-one.

For breakfast we almost invariably had soaked

bread: the children's flavoured with milk and sugar; the "grown-ups'" with butter, pepper and salt. Meat was rare. The Sunday dinner almost always consisted of steak-puddings or boiled bacon; during the week we sometimes had liver or lights; but more often plain suet- or bread-pudding, with vegetables. On Sundays the meat-pudding or bacon was always followed by a fruit-pudding of some kind. We seldom had pies—they didn't go so far as puddings; and roast or baked joints were undreamed-of luxuries.

At Willingdon the school-master, Mr. Hurst, and his assistant, Mr. Ewins, were men of different calibre to the Jevington pedagogue. They were, for that period, up to date, taking a keen interest in their scholars, and doing their best to advance them. They both, I remember, used to ride the old "ordinary" bike. Under their care these schooldays at Willingdon were much happier than my earlier ones. I advanced very rapidly, and came to be held up as a model to those of more sluggish intelligence. They say that "happy is the people that has no history"! I suppose these years must have been happy for me, for they were most uneventful. Apart from my school experiences, I only remember that I was continually falling in love with one or the other of the village girls. The first one was a

bewitching brunette named Laura. I kissed her one day in the school porch. This heinous outrage was reported to her father, a Calvinistic shoemaker, who, catching me passing his house a day or two after, lectured me for half-an-hour on my wickedness.

At this school I first came into contact with party politics. During my last few months there the '80 election took place, and as a friendly shoemaker—a strong Radical and an atheist, who lent me books—told me that the Liberals were the friends of the poor working people, I became an ardent Liberal. That party gained a large majority in the country, but to my disgust they failed to win East Sussex. This same shoemaker had formerly been a colporteur. He had quite a decent library, which I was very glad to make use of. Among the books he lent me the one which at that time I most enjoyed was *Haydn's Dictionary of Dates*—a book which ought to be accessible to all the scholars in the higher standards of elementary schools. Our historical courses, as I remember them, gave us only a narrow, vague view of the history of our world.

At Willingdon school I had my first formal introduction to the arts. At Jevington we had

one or two lessons in drawing, but though I always longed to learn to draw, lessons were not always to be had. My grandfather had, I presume, a musical turn, which he exercised occasionally on a much-prized brass whistle, but I learned little or nothing of the art and craft of music until I went to Willingdon school, where, on the outbreak of the Russo-Turkish war and the Jingo fever, a drum and fife band was organized. In this I was allowed to play the triangle; the performers on the fifes facetiously remarking that I played the principal instrument, as I was supposed to keep the rest in time. Later, the bass drummer resigning his post, I was promoted to that dignity. We used to march round the village making collections towards the cost of our instruments, music, and gold-braided caps. While I was big drummer Miss Heinemann (whose family at that time lived at Ratton, the residence of the Hon. Freeman Thomas, M.P.) was married. This was made the occasion of a great *fête* in Ratton Bottom—a little valley below Ratton Place. Our band was requisitioned. As I was at most only eleven years of age, it was necessary for another small boy to march along and help carry my drum while I belaboured it. Going back into the village at the conclusion of

this *fête*, we had to climb a rather steep slope. Here my assistant let go of our instrument, and I rolled back with the drum on top of me, beating away till I was picked up.

This Miss Heinemann's family were very good to the village children. On the occasion of her marriage each child was given a post-office bank-book with a shilling in it to their credit, to induce them to learn to save. Mine was soon withdrawn by my mother. Every winter they distributed cloth to make the boys suits, "lindsey-wolsey" to make the girls frocks, and flannel for underclothes for both girls and boys.

At this my last school I did fairly well in arithmetic, geography, grammar and reading. When I stayed at the school during lunch and dinner times, as I often did, I used to read the books intended for the higher standards, if I could get hold of them. But I was most proficient in "Scripture knowledge." I was placed at the head of the school, and held up as an example to the rest on account of my theology, and I knew practically as much about God as a field-mouse knows of the moon.

At this school, too, I composed my first poem. It ran something like this, but as I am quoting from memory I will not vouch for its accuracy—

"A ship was sailing on the sea,
The sky was clear and light,
And old de Bourne was at the helm,
His face was glad and bright.

Then all at once a storm arose,
Which swept that ship away,
And what became of old de Bourne
I'll now go on to say.

A shark was lurking down below,
A looking for his dinner,
And very pleased was he to dine
Upon that wicked sinner."

There was more of it, but this is all I recollect.

In addition to our annual school treat, a concert in the school-room in the winter, and our marches out with the band, our pleasures consisted of sliding ("tobogganing") down the grassy slopes of the downs on pieces of board—a very exciting pastime, though practically safe when the slope was well chosen. There are some fine slopes above Lower Willingdon, and the pastime can be enjoyed almost any time of the year. Indeed, it is best in the summer when the grass is dry and crisp, and the air scented with wild herbs. There was also the recurring village fair and club feast, "Maying," Guy Fawkes' Day, cricket in the summer, and sliding in the winter. Of these, the village fair, club feast and "Maying" are now things of the past.

The Guy Fawkes celebrations, with their torches, rockets and queer, fancy costumes, are flickering out. At that time football was practically unknown among us; but cricket was *the* great thing. Most of the boys were devoted to it, and have since, some of them, become very proficient. One, Joe Vine, who plays for Sussex, has achieved a great name. I have always taken a keen interest in our county cricket. It is about the only form of sport I do take an interest in. I have been hoping for years to see Sussex at the head of the counties, but I am getting an old man now, and they seem as far off as ever. Talking of "the" game, I once wrote some verses in which I prophesied that in their northern tour our county would beat both Yorkshire and Lancashire. I sent these to the *Clarion*, and as our side was badly beaten by Yorks at Leeds, Harry Beswick printed them, with a very caustic comment. However, as Ranji and his men went on to Old Trafford and gave Lancashire "what for," "Bezique," who "wondered what Lancs would do with our lot when their turn came," didn't have the smile all to himself.

Before leaving Willingdon, I must speak with the highest praise of the vicar, the late Canon

Lowe. I was too young to form an opinion of his powers as a preacher, but I do know that he used to lend those of us who cared to have them copies of *The Boys' Own Paper*, *Young England*, *Chatterbox*, and other magazines, and he would answer any questions we put to him about what we had been reading. He was a white-haired, benevolent old gentleman. He, earlier in our stay at Willingdon, procured my admission to the Eye Infirmary, Queen's Road, Brighton, and accompanied me and my mother to that institution.

This was the first time I had ever been away from home for any length of time, and it seemed very strange to me. There were four or five patients beside myself. The second day I was there I underwent an operation, without anæsthetics, part of the iris of my left eye being removed, so as to expose more of the surface of the pupil. Ever since I was a child a small speck (called an "ulcera," I believe) has obscured the direct vision of that eye. The operation was fearfully painful. The last thing I saw was the lancet descending. Then there was a terrible pang and all went red. I shrieked, but as I was securely strapped down to the operating table I could not move. After that for over a fortnight

I had to go about feeling my way with my eye bandaged. Although we had plenty of good food, I could eat scarcely anything, and was very homesick. When the bandages were removed I found that objects held quite close to my eye became out of focus. It is so still. Their outlines become blurred and indistinct. The bridge of my eye-glasses, for instance, multiplies itself so many times that it looks like a narrow black cloud through which I can see other objects. At a distance I can see quite well, and have no difficulty whatever in getting about, though I must admit I should be sorry to undertake to drive a motor.

I visited Willingdon this week. It doesn't seem greatly changed, except that the passing motors have spoilt the appearance of the roadside gardens and hedgerows. I have not been to Jevington for a long while. It lies in a secluded valley off the main road, five miles by a footpath over the hills, and seven miles by road from Eastbourne. Willingdon is only about two and a half miles on the main road to Lewes, Brighton and London. It is situated on a spot which divides, not "the Desert from the Sown," but the beautiful old Downs, with their wide, open spaces, from the cultivated Weald.

When I was twelve years old, my mother having made the acquaintance of a country butcher who had turned cabman in Eastbourne, we went to live together in that town, leaving my grandmother and cousin Harry behind in the village.

CHAPTER IV

GOING TO WORK

THE butcher-cabman would have married my mother, but as he had a wife still living it was out of the question. In his younger days he had been a thoroughly bad lot, a drunkard, whose cruelties drove his wife away from him. When he met my mother he had been a teetotaler for some years, and, I believe, remained so till his death. He treated her well until she died. She could not remain in Willingdon because she was already expecting a child and she was ashamed of that fact.

We occupied two unfurnished rooms in Susan's Road for a time. Here my mother continued to do a little dressmaking. Directly we arrived in the town I set out in search of employment. It being August and the height of the season, I obtained a situation at once with a Mr. Gilbert, a local baker, as errand boy. Here I remained only four days. Being fragile (I was just turned twelve) I found the baskets of bread heavy to carry, I did not know my way

about the town, and I expect the shop windows formed an irresistible attraction to the boy fresh from the country. Also my mother had provided me with a new pair of boots which were much too small for me. Anyway, I was gone too long on my errands and thus quickly earned the order of the sack. Then I obtained work with George Vine, who kept a baker's shop in Pevensey Road. There were several boys employed there. Our duties consisted in selling hot rolls in the early morning, buns and tarts on the beach later in the day, and we filled up our time by delivering bread, running errands and washing up and cleaning tins and other utensils used in the bakehouse. I stayed at this place some time. I was there at the time of the great blizzard in January '81, when I had to wait outside of the bakehouse door in the snow, because if it had been opened to admit me it would have spoilt the " batch " of bread.

On February 14 the same year, my sister Kate was born. Joe and Arthur, my two younger brothers, aged respectively eight and four, were sent to a private school of the "dame" variety, at which the fee was sixpence per week per child. My own treatment at home was very harsh. Although I boarded with the baker for whom I worked I had to give up all my wages. Some-

times my mother would give me a penny on Sundays, but that was all. After a time, growing sick of it all and full of dreams of an independent career, I ran away to Hastings, where my cousin Harry had at that time gone to work; but the police promptly sent me back home. As I had spent all my wages I received a cruel thrashing, which implanted a deep hatred in me against the cabman who gave it me and my mother who authorized it.

Then followed many other situations. One at the *Gazette* office, where I had to clean printing rollers and hawk newspapers. I was never good at hawking anything, and I did not make a successful newsboy. Chemists, grocers, drapers, book-shops followed. If I liked a place and tried hard to keep it I was certain to get discharged; if I didn't like it and didn't worry I was usually kept on. I read a great deal when I had the chance, my favourite paper being Henderson's *Young Folks*. It had, I believe, been called *Young Folks' Budget*, and afterwards appeared as *Young Folks' Paper*. Anyway, it was, in spite of the extravagance of some of its stories, superior to most juvenile publications of that day. I wonder if any of my readers remember *Don Zalva the Brave*, who met with more exciting adventures in a week than the Cid

encountered in his whole life! or *Ralpho the Fearless, the Young Swordsman of Warsaw*, whose truly wonderful history inspired our young hearts with undying hatred of Russian tyranny and pity for poor fallen Poland! But besides these extravagant romances there were some really good stories imported from America, to say nothing of *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped*, and *The Black Arrow* by the late R. L. Stevenson. I very much preferred *Young Folks* to the baser kind of boys' paper which was so prevalent at that time. I have no doubt but that such demoralizing rubbish as was served up in *The Boys of London and New York* and the *Young men* (?) *of Great Britain*, and such like publications paved the way for the existence of our more disreputable daily press. I have read Mr. Wells's *Tono-Bungay* since writing the foregoing, but I still think the "Penny Dreadfuls" of that period an unmixed evil.

I did not tire of *Young Folks* for a good many years. I have always liked to have at least one paper in which to take a keen interest. After *Young Folks*, while I was under the religious influence, it was the *Gospel Standard*, then the *Clarion*, which made Friday a red-letter day every week for years; now the *New Age*, the *Clarion* still, the *Woman Worker*, since Julia

Dawson has occupied the editorial chair, and the *Sunday Chronicle*.

After a time, my home life growing more and more intolerable to me, I ran away again. This time, instead of going to Hastings, I made a bee-line, as near as I could, towards Brighton, going over the hills. After passing through East Dean and Friston I made for the cliffs, forgetting that I should have to cross the little river Cuckmere, of whose existence I was certainly aware when I was at school as, being told by the teacher to draw a map of Sussex on the blackboard one day I included that river in it, fairly accurately indicating its course, much to his surprise, as it was not given in our school maps of the county. As it happened, however, a postman was crossing when I came to it, and he very kindly ferried me over. It seemed to me then, and I have often thought since, that this spot—where the Cuckmere falls, or rather wanders, into the sea—would make an ideal site for a small seaside town. It has a southerly aspect and is sheltered from the north-east and east by Beachy Head and the intervening "Seven Sisters," and from the north-west by other downs. Indeed, it is a great pity that Eastbourne itself does not stand to the west rather than the east of Beachy Head.

The postman charged me nothing for giving me a lift in his boat, which was fortunate, as I was penniless. On reaching the farther bank I walked on some distance, when I came to a large building where there were several forges in full blast. Here I inquired my way to Seaford, which I knew to be the next town on my road. It was quite dark, so I suppose the smiths were working overtime, or else a night-shift. They asked me what I was going to Seaford for, I told them to look for work. They directed me, and made a collection for me which amounted to over five shillings. But they didn't offer me a job. That night I slept upon a pile of iron pipes beside a watchman's fire in Seaford. The next morning I walked the few miles into Newhaven, where I wandered about the harbour and the town. Failing to see or hear of a "Boy Wanted" anywhere I foolishly spent my money on a ticket to New Cross. I thought I should be certain to succeed in London.

I had, perhaps, a penny or twopence left when I reached town. I wandered about the rest of the day, still looking for work. Tired and footsore, I found myself on London Bridge at night, and sitting down in one of the old alcoves I fell asleep. Presently I awoke with a glare in my eyes, to find myself surrounded by a small crowd

with a policeman standing over and shaking me. I told them my father and mother were dead and I had come to London to look for work. I suppose, dressed as I was in a black velveteen jacket and white cord trousers, I looked a strange sight to them. Anyway, the policeman let me go, and the people gave me enough money to buy a supper and pay for a bed.

The next day I tramped about London looking for work without success. At night some fishmongers in a shop under one of the archways at Ludgate Hill Station gave me some food and paid for my lodging. The next day they directed me to a boys' home in Clapham Road. I do not recollect much of my reception there or what I thought of the place. The next day I was sent out with a shoe-black's box to stand under the archway at Clapham Road Station. Then I was employed scrubbing and cleaning in the house for nearly a fortnight. The boys there seemed to me a very decent, well-behaved lot, except one, an inveterate bully, who was always tormenting the weaker ones. I stood his bullying till I found it wearisome, then I hit him over the head with a thick stick, cutting it open and sending him howling to the superintendent. I had given this superintendent my mother's name and address, thinking, as she

was always finding fault with me, she would be glad to let me stay in the home. However, she was not, apparently, for I was sent back to Eastbourne.

More situations followed my return, but the next year I made my final bolt—this time into the country. When we moved into Eastbourne in 1880 I was twelve years old. At the time of my final exit from home I was fifteen. Though I have seen much sorrow since, those three years were decidedly the most unhappy I have ever lived through. If my mother ever gave me a kind word I do not remember it: I am sure she never gave me an affectionate one. While she always treated me badly and petted my younger brothers and our little sister, I was very fond of them all three. When I left home Joe, the elder, was nearly eleven, Arthur a chubby little chap of seven, and Kate a little golden-haired fairy of three.

As I remember, I used sometimes to have to do very hard and even dangerous work—pushing heavy tradesmen's trucks, carrying heavy loads, and standing outside second or third storey windows to clean them. But while all my money was taken from me I was badly fed and clothed. Once I was at work for a well-to-do tradesman in Terminus Road; he was ex-

ceedingly religious, so much so that he would not allow his children to go to Christmas parties. One day he set me to clean out the space in front of the cellar window which was covered by an iron grating in the pavement in front of his shop window. Here I found about fourpence three-farthings in coppers, and got into trouble because I stuck to it! He was a preacher for one of the obscure sects which drone their monotonous dirges (you can't call them "hymns") in various holes and corners about the town.

I had few, if any, pleasures besides my reading. On Sunday I attended the Congregational School, where I was in Mr. Cripps' class. The annual outing, usually at Pevensey Castle, used to break the monotony of the year. There, for one day, one could be a child and play again. Apart from these great days and Mr. Cripps' kindness to me, I remember little of the school, except that when, after early lessons, the scholars filled the centre of the large school-room to listen to the superintendent's address, the boys down one side, the girls down the other, the elder boys who sat near the girls would point out the ambiguous stories and passages in the Bible to them, and they didn't seem to mind. Of this

school the late Mr. Neville Strange was superintendent, and one of the teachers was a Mr. Leonard who has since been very active in the Socialist movement in the North.

During this period I first learned to smoke. After my first attempt, which, although it made me feel giddy, did not make me sick, I took to it naturally, and I have been devoted to my pipe ever since. I made no friends, except the sons of a baker whom I sometimes helped when I had no other work, in return for a few coppers. These became very good friends, and employed me regularly when I afterwards returned to Eastbourne. Most of the boys I got to know through working with them were too filthy in their habits and conversation to suit me, and I made no girl friends; I was usually very badly dressed, and unless I made a few coppers unknown to my mother I never had any pocket money. And I was naturally very shy. I buried myself as much as I could in my reading and my day-dreams to escape the irksome realities of my everyday life. Unless trouble was very acute and pressing I could nearly always withdraw my mind from my environment into a land of dreams—a land which was my very own, where great and glorious things happened. This faculty I have

enjoyed ever since I can remember, though of late years I find it less easy to detach myself from my surroundings, and the visions I see are less vivid. I suffered very much from tooth-ache; it was this, I think, which led me to smoke, because the tobacco deadened the pain.

CHAPTER V

COUNTRY AND TOWN

In the summer of 1883 my mother was taken ill with consumption. I was out of employment at the time, and though I did my best by trying to keep the house clean for her and helping to cook the meals, she became more irritable with me than ever. One night towards the end of August, having been out looking for work without finding any, and coming home to a flood of abuse and no supper, I quietly walked out again and took to the road.

I walked to Stone's Cross that night. I met some lads from the *Gazette* office on the way, who gave me, I believe, some food and coppers, and directed me to an empty house in which to sleep. This cottage was about to be demolished. Its windows had been taken out, and sleeping on the bare boards in an upper room, I found it anything but cheerful. Early the next morning I was astir, and had reached Heathfield soon after eight. Now I come to think of it, I fancy the lads from the *Gazette* office must have given me at least a shilling, for I had enough money

to get some breakfast at Heathfield, and foo during the rest of the day at Mayfield an Rotherfield. After a long, lonely uphill wal through Eridge Park, I reached Tunbridg Wells late in the afternoon. Here I had a loo round for a job, then some supper and a bed a a common lodging-house. It being nearly th end of August, this place was full of hop-picker on their way to the gardens. Among them wa a little old shoemaker from Chelsea, whose ac quaintance I made. He advised me not to g into Kent, but to accompany him to a place h knew of near Wadhurst, which I did. W started early the next morning through a drizzl rain, eating blackberries we picked from th hedgerows to eke out our scanty provisions Arrived at the farm, we were engaged, and give an open cattle shed in which to sleep among th straw. The next day we started operations; w had a bin between us, and were paid at the rat of twopence a bushel for picking the hops, whic were very small. A small shopkeeper let u have some bread, onions, and other provision on credit, and the people at a cottage "windfall' apples at a penny a gallon. Bread-and-butte and tea for breakfast and supper, and bread-and cheese, with onions or apples, for dinner, with a rasher or piece of steak fried over a gipsy fir

for a change on Sundays, formed our diet, and I doubt if I ever enjoyed anything more heartily. The people at this first farm were very quiet and respectable. We had a fortnight there, when we went to another at Mayfield, where we had another fortnight. Here the pickers were a rough lot from the purlieus of Edward Street, Brighton, and there was a good deal of drinking, fighting, and worse, going on, especially on Saturday nights. It was a month's rare fun for me, however. There was no one to nag at me, and I earned ten or twelve shillings a week, which I did what I liked with, as I had it all myself.

When we finished up at the farm we had a good dinner of steak and fried onions at Mayfield, and then, instead of trusting to our feet, very foolishly paid our rail fare to Tunbridge Wells. Here my companion left me, to go on the drunk. The lodging-houses were all full on account of the returning hoppers, so at last a friendly policeman persuaded a lodging-house keeper to let me sleep in their best bedroom. I woke up feeling bad with a heavy cold, but tramped through the rain to Sevenoaks, where I picked up with a poor shiftless sort of a chap who was also tramping to London, where I had made up my mind to again try my luck, calling

at every baker's shop I came to to see if I could get work. I had worked mostly in bakehouses. If they could not give me work—and they never could or at least never did—and I was hungry, I asked them to give me a piece of bread. I never had the courage to beg at a private house, or else my pride would not let me. But I knew if the bakers cared to employ me I was more than willing to work and could make myself useful to them.

At last we came to Woolwich. Here we were both "broke," and it was raining, so we made use of the casual ward.

Personally, I do not believe in the traditional hell, but there ought to be one with a very hot place indeed for those who invented, administer and perpetuate the casual ward. It is cruel and inhuman; it is worse than prison. The "spike" is too mild a name for it.

The next day I had four pounds of oakum to pick, but I didn't pick all of it. They let me off the following day, however, as I had never been there before, and I have never been inside a casual ward since. I would rather do something to get myself locked up. I didn't mind the bath. I needed it, and my clothes must have been in a bad state through sleeping out. But I did object to the plank bed, with only two coarse rugs, the

bread and "skilly" for breakfast and supper, the bread and cheese and water for dinner, the loneliness of the cell night and day, but most of all to the brutal manner of the officials.

That day I spent trying the bakers' shops or the "Boy Wanted" notices for work in vain. The night, though I was not hungry, I passed wretchedly by walking about the streets. The next morning, being down Whitechapel way, a friendly policeman directed me to apply at a home near Charrington's Brewery, Mile End Road—that of the "Tower Hamlets Shoeblack Brigade." They took me in and set me to work cleaning. Then after a day or two they sent me out with a shoeblack box. This was my first, but not last, experience of the life of sorrow which depends upon casual employment. I left this home after a week or two to go to another in Limehouse which was connected with Dr. Barnardo's. Here I stayed till the following May, when a longing to return home seized me, and I left it for Eastbourne.

I do not know if the same conditions obtain in these homes now. We went out with our boxes every morning, and had to "pay in" so much at night for our stands. The sum varied according to the stand. Thus one paid more for the pitch at Stepney Station than the Burdett

Road one. My "pitches" were Burdett Road, Canning Town Station, and the "Great Eastern" at the corner of the East and West India Dock Roads. If we did not "book in" the money they charged they used to threaten to turn us out. Besides our beds and boxes, they gave us, I believe, tea and bread-and-butter for breakfast on Sundays. I forget about the rest of the week, except that we always had to buy our own dinners. I do not think, on the whole, we fared so badly. I liked most of the boys, and they treated me well. I liked, too, the bustle and life of the streets. I was deeply interested in the strange faces and dresses of the Asiatic sailors in the West India Dock Road.

We were marched on Sunday mornings to Limehouse Church. The rest of the day we had to ourselves. I used to spend the afternoons as a rule walking round the docks looking at the shipping. Once or twice when I had had a good day I took a night off and went to a music-hall or theatre. I was at "Lusby's"—now the "Paragon," Mile End Road—the night before it was burnt down. My first experience of the theatre was at the Pavilion, Whitechapel. On these occasions I climbed over the area railings and slept in the coal-cellar, giving as an excuse the next morning that I had been to Islington or some other distant

part after a job. I always got off with a scolding. I met with no serious trouble while I was there.

Part of the time I was employed delivering circulars and carrying sandwich boards. With one pair of the latter I wandered for some weeks about the streets of Stepney and Mile End. Other times I was employed scrubbing and cleaning about the house. One day, while so employed, I tried to ride an old "ordinary" bike belonging to the master, Mr. Hawkins, round the back yard. The back wheel came off, throwing me over on my head. As I remember him, this Mr. Hawkins was not at all bad to the boys. We enjoyed a great amount of liberty—more than boys are usually given in such places, and far more than they would get in the workhouse, and it must be remembered that liberty is just as dear to the lad of fourteen or fifteen as it is to the man of forty or fifty. Of course, we were taught nothing. The home was, I believe, regarded as a temporary shelter for lads who were too old for the Stepney Causeway Homes—barrack-like places we regarded with more or less contempt—and too young for the Youths' Labour Home in Commercial Road. The latter place has been provided for older lads, who are eventually drafted to the Grimsby or Yarmouth fishing

fleet or sent to Canada, where many of them have done very well.

None of these institutions deal really adequately with the homeless boy. Some of them are really nothing but private workhouses maintained by voluntary subscriptions, in which the inmates are so many little slaves and prisoners, treated approximately like convicts. That they exist at all is owing to the fact that they provide well-paid berths for a few officials. I know that one of the founders of such an institution, having failed in his profession, started a "boys' home" without a half-penny of his own to bless himself with. Being a fluent ranter, and possessing some business ability, he built up a great concern, and long before his death was able to take expensive apartments in the most fashionable part of Eastbourne for himself and family for their summer holidays.

Some of the "homes"—especially the shoeblack variety—are simply run to exploit the poor boys who are driven into them. I had some experience of two of these places, besides the "Union Jack" in Limehouse. One was near the Mile End Road, the other in Leman Street, from both of which I was turned into the street because I failed to earn the stipulated sum to pay for box, bed, breakfast and supper. To the

Leman Street "Home" I had to pay tenpence per day for a pitch in a draughty passage in Fenchurch Street, where, if I remember rightly, I earned less than sixpence.

At the same time, these places offer a refuge for the homeless lad who has a very proper scorn and dread of the provision made for him by his hard foster-mother the State in the workhouse. No doubt many boys, sharper and more fortunate than I, have, making these places stepping-stones to better things, been saved from lives of degradation and crime. Whatever their failings, they leave the boy a great amount of liberty to develop his individuality in his own way, and to use his initiative when opportunity occurs.

There were boys of every description in the one at Limehouse, in which I spent nine months —mostly healthy, clean-minded, "manly" boys; and though those who wanted to used to smoke when they had the chance, and one or two of the bolder spirits occasionally rose to the enormity of a glass of "four ale," I do not remember that any of them abused their freedom.

Before leaving these London experiences, there is one incident I must record with pleasure and gratitude to the stranger who figures in it. I was standing outside an A.B.C. shop in Lud-

gate Circus one night, homeless and penniless, gazing wistfully at the food in the window, for I was very hungry. While I was doing so a young man came up to me and asked me if I *was* hungry. "I *am that*," I said. He gave me sixpence, which bought me supper and paid for a night's lodging. He went his way, and probably forgot his kind impulse in a little while. I wish I could see him now that I have some power of self-expression to tell him what his sixpence meant to me. It was so much more than sixpence. Whoever he was, I hope fate has dealt kindly with him.

I am not certain whether it was during my stay in London this time, or later, but I fancy it was later, that I used to see William Morris addressing the Socialist meetings at the Dodd Street end of Burdett Road. If I had only known! but I was at the time under the influence of some revivalists, and we used to walk, like the priest and Levite, on the other side. This is a digression, but digressions are inevitable, because I am not writing a romance in which the incidents are all cut and dried, and their orderly narration inevitable. I am trying, in spite of my imperfect gifts and my limited experience in the art of writing, to set down a human life for you.

Then the spring came, with May sunshine and

the call of the fields and country lanes. Besides, I had not written to or received a letter from Eastbourne, and I wondered how they were all getting on. I told Mr. Hawkins I thought I should like to go back home and try for work at the baking. To my surprise, I found there was eight and sixpence due to me—possibly part payment for the scrubbing, sandwich-boards, or bill-distributing. At all events, I was glad of it. If I remember rightly, both Mr. Hawkins and the boys were sorry to lose me.

CHAPTER VI

BACK TO EASTBOURNE

My eight and sixpence carried me nicely to Eastbourne. I was not so foolish as to take a ticket direct. For one thing, I wanted a quiet walk in the country where I could think: from London to Eastbourne without an hour or two's reflection seemed out of the question. Besides, I wanted to have as much money as possible when I got there as, perhaps, a peace offering, or at any rate to stand by me a day or two. But I wanted to get well away from London at once, so I enriched the London, Brighton & South Coast Railway to the extent of the price of a third-class ticket to Croydon, from whence I jogged merrily along to Cuckfield, where I put up for the night at a roadside inn. Though I must have been very tired indeed I could not sleep for a long time on account of the perfect stillness. For nine months in the home at Limehouse I had slept soundly with the clang of tram-car bells in my ears till midnight and the rumble of passing dock trains every few minutes all night long (the home stands within a few

yards of a branch line of the Great Eastern Railway), and the sudden change from din to absolute quiet was not conducive to early repose. However, I slept at last, and rising in the morning had a good wash out in the fresh country air and walked to Lewes, from which I took train to Polegate.

My grandmother and an aunt and uncle still lived at Willingdon. I went to my aunt's, and she told me my mother was dead. My grandmother was sent for, and burst into tears on seeing me. It seems all sorts of tales had got afloat about me: I had been in prison, been killed, and I don't know what else. From Willingdon I walked into Eastbourne to look up my old friends the Strettons, the people who kept the baker's shop whose sons were good to me. I found Ernest, one of them, washing the pavement down in front of his aunt's house in High Street. I went home with him and they gave me some tea and asked me to look round at the bakehouse on the Monday morning. I returned to Eastbourne on a Saturday. Then I went to our old home in Susan's Road, where I found our lodgers—a plasterer turned bath chair-man and his wife—had taken the house and that the cabman had a room with them. I saw my little sister, whom they were caring for, and learned

that my brothers had been sent to the workhouse. I saw Joe once afterwards, just before he was going away to a home at Melton Bryan in Bedfordshire, and it made my heart ache to see the little chap in his workhouse uniform. He cried bitterly on seeing me, and oh! how deeply I grieved to think I could not take him and Arthur out of the loathed bastile and care for them myself! I never saw Arthur again. They were both eventually sent to Canada, and I am glad to say are doing well, Joe being in steady employment at good wages near Seattle and Arthur being "depot agent" at Sandridge, Minn., on the Great North Railway.

I put up at the Rising Sun, Seaside, that night and during the next week. On the Sunday I saw the cabman, who expostulated with me for running away. I told him I would rather run away twenty times than be sent to the workhouse. He had an American trunk and several other things belonging to me, but he refused to give them up. Later he inherited some money and bought a horse and cab of his own. He was always saying that when this money came he would help my brothers but not me: we none of us had a pennyworth of help from him. It was at this time I discovered that he and my mother had not been married, and I certainly

would not have accepted anything from him, I was so angry about it.

Later he lived with another woman, who made my poor sister's life during her childhood as much a burden to her as mine had been to me. The little golden-haired fairy has grown into a big, dark woman now; she is married and has many children.

I went to the bakehouse on the Monday morning and was engaged regularly at a small salary. Previously the two elder sons had done the work, employing a journeyman; on my return I found Ernest, the second son, anxious to give up baking to become a carpenter, so I suppose I took his place and he was apprenticed to Alfred Boré, his maternal uncle. Frank, the third son, whom I first met at the *Gazette* office (where, I believe, he was to have been trained as a journalist), also went in for the plane and chisel instead; the youngest, Walter, having just left school, joined us in the bakehouse: the journeyman had been dismissed.

In Horace Stretton, the eldest son, I had a good friend. A tall thin young man, he did not enjoy very robust health; and, if everything one hears of his younger days is true, he was one of the gayest of a gay set of fairly well-to-do young men about town at that time. He,

like all the Strettons, was very intelligent, taking a keen interest in books, as well as other things. He was an ardent volunteer, as was also his brother Frank, and rose to be, I believe, sergeant-major in the 2nd R.S.V.B.A. The second son, Ernest, was much quieter, greatly addicted to the harp and mandoline, which he played well. Of Frank, the third son, I did not see much (he never worked in the bakehouse); but the youngest, Walter, was there with me a great deal, as he mostly took charge of the shop during the day while Horace was out with the horse and cart delivering the bread. Like a good many younger sons, Walter was the best business man of the family.

To write the history of this family is practically to write the history of Eastbourne for a hundred years. Early in the nineteenth century the town consisted of one large village—now known as "Old Town"—and what one might call three small hamlets. Going from the Old Town, which lies in a kind of recess in the hills, through Compton Place Road, the old coach road, and passing Compton Place itself, then the residence of the Earls of Burlington, now one of the many country seats belonging to the Dukes of Devonshire, one came to the village of Meads, nestling close under Beachy Head.

There is a tradition that no one ever died at Meads in those days. It comprised then a farmhouse or two, a few cottages occupied by farm hands and fishermen, and a row occupied by coastguards. In front of these, which stood on the site at present occupied by the Convalescent Home, there was a stretch of allotment gardens reaching to the edge of the cliffs, with one or two old cottages in one corner. These gardens were cultivated by the coastguards, about one of whom a story is told. He had dug a plot of ground up close to the edge of the cliff in which he wished to plant cabbages, when he found he had left his cabbage plants behind at home, so he went indoors to get them. When he returned with them the plot he had dug was gone. There had been a landslip.

At the foot of the slope from Beachy Head, towards the marsh on the main coach road, stood South Bourne, a hamlet of a few houses and an inn or two, much used, if tradition is reliable, in the olden times by smugglers. It is now almost entirely swept away and is occupied by South Street. The Town Hall at the top occupies the site of the old stocks bank, so that offenders against the majesty of the law were conducted to the same spot in olden times as they are still.

Near the sea, at the east end of the present town, were a few fishermen's cottages, with some better houses used by the few summer visitors who ventured so far from London.

In those days the grandfather of the young men I worked with was apparently the sole carpenter, wheelwright and undertaker in the place. He occupied a large house in High Street, which had a lion over the porch from which it took its name, and workshops at the rear in which, even in my time, were many quaint old appliances of his trade, besides some valuable old chests which were then used as corn-bins! The old gentleman lived in this house till his death at the ripe old age of ninety-six. The lords of the manor had always been anxious to acquire the property, which was his own freehold; since the death of a daughter, or daughters, to whom, I believe, he bequeathed it they have acquired it, and it is now demolished.

His son, the father of my friends, was a gentle, quiet old gentleman—a bit, I believe, of an invalid. I am afraid he was not a great business man. He formerly owned a mill near Folkington, which was burnt down when I was a boy at Jevington. I saw the reflection of the fire in the sky, little thinking I should know its owner and his family so intimately in after

years. It stood in ruins for a great while and was sold at last for a mere song. The family seemed to have a good deal of property in various parts of the country, but for some reason or other they did not appear to look after it much.

My friends lived with their father and mother in two copyhold cottages they had near the Star brewery. These two cottages had been converted into one, a shop window replacing the window of one of them. At the back was a largish garden surrounded by hot-houses containing grape-vines and peaches, which were the father's special care. Years ago, he told me, he used to grow for Covent Garden market and make very good prices indeed. When I first knew him his grapes (Black Hamburg, I believe they were called) fetched 2*s*. 6*d*. and 3*s*. per pound, and the peaches 3*d*., 4*d*. and 6*d*. each. He did little or nothing else besides look after these hot-houses.

The mother was a cheerful, bustling business woman. There was also a sister—a girl in short frocks when I returned to Eastbourne. I forget whether it was one or two nights a week I was privileged to go up there to tea (the bakehouse was in South Street), but it was one or the other. Indeed, for a good many years I

spent many happy evenings there, even after I left their employment, and I used to delight to hear the old gentleman's stories of old times and old people in Eastbourne: of the lady of the manor, Mrs. Gilbert, who, with a Major Willard, the magistrate of that day, ruled the town; of the time of the Chartist rising, when the farmers, shopkeepers, and other well-to-do people stood or slept behind barred and bolted doors with guns loaded, expecting a raid by the peasantry. Bless their timid hearts! the English peasantry forgot how to rise hundreds of years ago.

Sometimes a friend of Ernest would drop in and there would be music—the harp and mandolin coming into play. They were both very old instruments, the harp, which Ernest put into repair himself, a big, very mellow one; the mandolin a flat-backed Italian with an open work copper cover to the sounding hole and a queerly shaped head from which the instrument had to be tuned with a key like that of a watch. They had a very old violin, too, which had been in the family from time immemorial. A competent violinist whom I took to look at it pronounced it a Guernarius. Ernest, who now occupies his father's old home, has all these instruments still, I believe. The old house is

but little changed, but the garden and greenhouses are gone. Tombstones are now made where grapes used to grow. And all the rest are gone except Ernest: Horace is in Gloucester, Frank in London, Walter has a flourishing business of his own in the town; but the father and mother and the daughter, of whom they were all so fond, have gone to their last rest.

Besides the nights in the house there used to be afternoons and evenings in the garden, when I and Walter used to get into mischief and sometimes quarrel, and Mrs. Stretton used to declare she "would *not* have that George Meek up there any more." I and Walter were about of an age. In one corner there was a furnace underground by means of which the houses were heated in the winter. Above this an old cabinet containing curious old carpenter's tools, among them many narrow moulding planes of different patterns. Out in the open garden, between the hot-houses which surrounded it, were old bureaux of walnut or mahogany standing exposed to all weathers.

Once or twice they made wine out of the prunings—the shoots and superfluous grapes—of the vines. They told me it was excellent, though I don't remember tasting it myself.

They kept it in large stone bottles; one of these, being too tightly corked, exploded one night—and they thought the house had blown down. They kept three dogs: a big lurcher bitch, a little brown spaniel named Shot, after Shotover, the winner of the Derby, which was my special favourite, and Bob, a little toy black-and-tan—at least he was supposed to be little, but he had grown so fat on good living he could hardly walk.

While I worked for them, and for many years afterwards, this place stood to me instead of a home. Whenever I was in trouble and needed advice, or had good news to tell, I always went straight there. I never slept in the house. When I returned from London after staying a week at the Rising Sun, which I found too expensive, I went to lodge with a friend of my grandmother at Lower Willingdon, walking the two or three miles between, night and morning. There I stayed all that summer, but when the bad weather set in I took lodgings in the town.

I was employed in their South Street bakehouse for about fifteen months. We did not begin very early, about seven a.m., when we had to make and bake the bread. I have often heard of alum being used in the making of

bread, but I have never seen a grain of it in any bakehouse in which I have worked. Our bread was made in the old-fashioned way, with yeast made by ourselves from malt and hops. Each morning, with the bread, a large boiler was put into the oven. This contained small potatoes, covered with water. When they were taken out the water was strained off and the potatoes were mashed in a tub with a large wooden pestle. They were then mixed with warm water, and a quantity of the home-made yeast mixed with flour was added. This, called the "comp," was allowed to stand till night, by which time it had risen and nearly filled the tub, the top of it appearing like the flowers of broccoli. It was then strained into the trough, more warm water and flour were added, and this formed the "sponge." This, which, when we left it at night, would be hardly more than a quarter of the way up the sides of the trough, by morning would have risen nearly to the top, when it had to be "broken up" with warm water into a thin batter, and more flour being then added, the dough proper was made. This was allowed to rise, and then, being taken out of the trough, weighed into two pound two ounce portions, which were moulded into the familiar forms in which bread is sold. The rest of the

day, after the bread had been dispatched to the customers, was spent in making cakes and pastry and cleaning up. Everything in this, as in most bakehouses in which I have worked, was kept scrupulously clean. I much preferred the making of "small goods": it did not require so much muscle as bread-making. Latterly this department was left almost entirely to me, and once or twice I spoilt a baking through getting absorbed in some book.

When we were working together in the morning we enlivened the time by singing and telling tales. Occasionally we varied the monotony with practical jokes. The bakehouse was partly underground. It faced the street, an iron grating covering a brick-paved recess where was a water-tap and shelves for keeping butter and such things cool. The door between the bakehouse and this recess rose some eighteen inches above the level of the pavement, so that we always had a good view of the street. One boy —a butcher's boy, I think—who used to pass frequently, annoyed Horace very much by the slip-shod way in which he walked, scraping his hob-nailed boots over the pavement and especially over our grating. One day he jumped up on an old gallon measure covered with a thick piece of wood, which we used to stand upon to

look out into the street, and called the lad back. "Hi!" he said. The boy turned round. "Here!" he said; "I want you." "What d'ye want?" said the boy, coming back. "Does the parish find you in boots?" asked Horace. The boy answered something saucy, so a day or two later he got a neatly rolled piece of dough under his ear which had been sent from a long section of gas-piping we kept as a "dough" shooter. This was a frequent experience of some of our acquaintances; we knew every one in the street. The upper part of our bakehouse door was filled in with small panes of glass, one of which had a small hole in the corner.

I and Walter were left in charge of the bakehouse and the shop overhead during the latter part of the day. Here some of the girls of the neighbourhood used to visit us occasionally, but though the conversation was sometimes pretty free nothing improper ever occurred, and for my own part, though I suppose they were passable girls, I did not fancy any of them.

In the autumn, my wages having been raised, I took lodgings in a large house in York Road, so as to be nearer my work. It was kept by a very old lady, who made her living by letting to unmarried working men. There were about a dozen of us, railwaymen, ostlers employed at

Weston's and other stables, saddlers, and so forth. Some time previous to my stay there she had lost nearly all the young men who were lodging with her at the time by one sad accident. Eleven of them had taken a large boat one Sunday morning for a trip; a sudden squall overturned it, and only one of them reached the shore alive. In my time a young man named Smith, the son of a Kentish paper-maker, met with a serious accident at the railway station, where he was employed as "lampey." Part of his duty consisted in changing the lamps in the carriages when trains ran into Eastbourne. Trying to climb a coach one day while the train was still in motion, he missed his footing and was run over, losing one leg. He was a clever chap, and had made two or three model locomotives and electric batteries.

Here, during the winter, we spent many lively evenings, playing cribbage, don, euchre, or sometimes, for a change, "tippet," a variation of the game of "cod 'em," which Jack Jones—not he of West Ham, but the Covent Garden porter of that name made famous by Albert Chevalier—was said to be very good at. This is eminently a game for six, eight, ten, or even twelve, people to play, and is very popular amongst working people. Having chosen your

sides, which must be of an equal number of players, one of them is selected to "work the piece" on each side. This "piece" may consist of a farthing or some small coin, or a button. The "worker" who, by the familiar method of "tossing," wins the piece and, so to speak, first innings for his party, taps it sharply on the table and proceeds to hide it in one of the hands of one of the players on his side, which have previously been placed as nearly as possible all together in his lap under the table. He then calls "Up!" and all the hands are placed clenched on the table. Beginning with the right-hand man, each player on the other side takes it in turn to try to "fetch the piece home" by guessing in which of the hands it is hidden. He may point out a certain hand and cry "Piece!" at once if he chooses to do so, or he may tell those on the opposite side to take their right or left hands away, or any individual player both of his. If any of these contains the "piece" he has, of course, lost it, but if he says "Piece" to the hand which contains it or orders all the other hands off he has won it. The "worker" on his side proceeds to hide it and the rôles are reversed. Every time the "piece" remains with the side who has it they score one. A cribbage board is used, twenty-one or thirty-one being the

game. In "cod 'em" you may use any tricky phrase to induce your opponents to reveal where the "piece" is hidden; in "tippet" only these two: "Piece" or "Take it away." If the "piece" is accidentally dropped on the floor while it is being "worked" the side which has dropped it loses it.

With the exception of one lodger, who soon had to find fresh quarters, none of the men came home the worse for drink, though now and then a good deal of "small" beer was consumed. They were a pretty happy lot, and we had some lively evenings. They were easily led, I imagine, as while when one young man came who was ultra-religious and insisted on preaching to them and having "Sankey and Moody" every night, most of them "got religion" slightly for a time. When another man, a clever, studious housepainter from Nottingham, who had lived previously in London, where he had frequently attended secular lectures, came to live with us and preached the militant atheism of those days, they were just as ready to listen to him. He was a tall, dark man, who had studied and travelled much. His favourite reading at that time was Taylor's *Astronomical-Theological Discourses*, long passages from which he would quote to us. He

was also intimate with other branches of learning, and would keep the others interested for hours by his long discourses of plant or animal life, astronomy, geology, or the wonders of chemistry. He occupied the same room as myself, and we had long talks together. I had from my earliest years found great difficulty in getting to sleep early at night, so that it was no hardship for me to lie awake and talk, and, indeed, long after he had gone to sleep I used to lie awake pondering over what he had told me.

My people had been Church of England to the extent that they conformed to that communion when attendance at a place of worship appeared to them imperative: that is to say at christenings, confirmations, weddings and funerals of members of the family. Otherwise I never remember them attending any place of worship. Beyond being obliged to repeat the usual little child's prayers and hymns when very young, I had no religious teaching at home. I am of opinion that the "gentry and clergy" were usually regarded as our natural enemies. I know the parson was usually spoken of with more or less derision. Canon Lowe was an exception.

In spite of my school attainments in "scrip-

ture knowledge," I am afraid my ideas of religion were extremely vague. I never remember to have had any fear of hell, but I liked to think of some supermundane power which could be called upon to help in times of trouble, or when one wanted anything very badly and could not see one's way to get it by ordinary means, and this conception of the Deity I found it hard to part with. It was fully a week before I came round to my agnostic friend's views, but I have held them with occasional lapses, of which I hope to treat in a future chapter, ever since.

When the warmer days came the parades and the young women to be found there claimed my fellow lodgers' attention. There were a few humorous adventures with servant girls with no particular harm in them in which I participated, and I had one or two experiences of my own. There was one girl in service at Eastbourne whom I met at my grandmother's at Willingdon one Sunday afternoon. I always spent my Sundays with my grandmother while she remained at Willingdon and I was in Eastbourne. I took a passing fancy to this girl, and we walked back into the town together; but I was too modest to suit her, and she gave me up. Apart from the fact that at sixteen—the age

I had reached by this time—a lad is rather susceptible to the charms of the fair, I had always been naturally of an affectionate, not to say amorous, disposition, yet I contracted no striking regard for any one girl at this time. When I *did* fall in love later it was with a vengeance!

I have always liked to live what I call a "full" life, that is to say, one not confined to a single interest. In addition to reading, of which I was always fond, and these flirtations, I became an ardent politician once more. At the bake-house I met another Radical of the *Reynolds'* type. He lodged in the house over the shop in South Street, which was sub-let, and spent many hours preaching the gospel of advanced Radical-Republicanism to us, though I am afraid I was his only disciple. I still used to see the shoemaker at Willingdon on Sundays, and borrow books of him, so that between the two I became well grounded in their faith. A wave of reform was sweeping the country, the agitation for the extension of the franchise was at its height, and we all expected great things. The Franchise and Redistribution Bills were passed by the Gladstone ministry in the same year. I do not remember attending any political meetings, except one at the Devonshire Park,

where the late Lord Edward Cavendish made what I considered a poor halting speech, nor did I read *Reynolds'* myself very regularly; but I was imbued with a sense of class-consciousness, which has intensified since, and I thought, with so many others, that the Liberals were going to do such wonders for the working people. The wonders we expected are still to be accomplished, and most of us have now found a new party and new associations. Life is short, and one is weary of being always fed upon an east-wind diet of empty promises.

This period was a very happy one. I had my liberty, as much money as was good for me, and—with the exception of three days when I was laid up with a very severe cold—I enjoyed good health. I was subject to those very heavy colds, the kind which make one feel nearly dead, all the time I worked indoors. I was not badly dressed; Horace Stretton, who always took a pride in dressing well, gave me several things he had outgrown. When I was in the "home" in London we used to go to Stepney Causeway to the principal homes for our clothing, which were debited to us and we had to pay for them out of our earnings.

In 1885, the Strettons' trade having fallen off, I was discharged at the end of the summer

season. I am afraid they were all rather too easy-going to be "good business people." The amounts some of their poor customers owed them—and most of their customers were poor—were surprising. As I am not convinced that people are rewarded or punished in any future life for the good or ill they do in this, I am glad to take this opportunity of expressing my appreciation and gratitude to this family for their kindness towards myself. If I had only been stronger and they more prosperous in their business, I could not have desired a happier life than one spent in their employment.

During this period I went to the theatre occasionally with "passes" given us for displaying the bills in the shop. I remember seeing Dion Boucicault's *Flying Scud*, besides various other melodramas. I fancy it must have been about this time that the Gilbert and Sullivan operas were put on the road, but though some of them were put on at the newly-opened Theatre Royal I did not see any of them. Melodrama was my only attraction, and I doubt if I should have appreciated either the fine music of Sullivan or the, if possible, finer wit of Gilbert. On the parades the entertainments seem to me to have been better and more varied than they are now. There was, I particularly remem-

ber, a troupe of real negroes who had been stranded in the town by the break-up of an *Uncle Tom's Cabin* company. They were such good singers and comedians and gave us such lovely real plantation songs that I have never cared for the artificial kind since.

CHAPTER VII

LONDON AND NEW YORK

FINDING I could get no other employment in Eastbourne, the roving spirit took hold of me, and I tramped to Brighton, a distance of twenty-five miles. Here I stayed for a week, lodging at a comfortable coffee-shop, but I could get no work. So I went on to London.

I spent two or three days tramping round, and the nights in the streets. Homeless, penniless, hungry, I walked about looking at the closed blinds and shutters, envying every one who had work to do and a bed to sleep on. At last I obtained work in a wood-chopping yard in the East End. I began by helping to carry the sawn blocks from the machine shed to the choppers, but the sawyer having an accident, cutting off a thumb and finger, and the others being afraid to tackle the job, I was asked to do so. This I did. They said I should have my head cut off before long. But I operated the saw for some months, with only a slight scratch on the back of my thumb which hardly drew blood. It was hard, tedious work standing in the same

place and doing the same thing for ten hours a day. There were about a hundred and twenty men and boys employed there then. I was in London in 1895, when the manager told me the number of hands had been reduced to forty owing to the competition of the Salvation Army "elevators." *Comment!*

I had been corresponding for some time with a brother of my grandmother who lived at Warsaw, Wyoming county, U.S.A. He wished to get me out there, so he sent me a prepaid passage ticket from London to his place.

The 1885 election was about this time, but I took little interest in it: I used to be too tired to take much interest in anything.

I left Euston on a wet evening, arriving in Liverpool about midnight. Here I embarked for New York. I was fearfully sick for the first two or three days. We were all herded together in the steerage, packed like herrings in a barrel, sleeping twenty-four in a cabin. There were people of all nationalities on board—even two Turks. The life of the ship, after we had found our sea-legs, was a Jew who could yodel "Sweet Violets," and an eccentric Irishman who sang night and day. "The Wanderer from Clare" was his favourite song.

We had fog for three days on the Banks of

Newfoundland, the foghorn going night and day. The voyage took us ten days and a half. The vessel was the *City of Richmond*, the same in which, I found afterwards, a cousin of mine had crossed. The food was plentiful and good. The only things I disliked were the boiled meat and the fish on Fridays. When we, much to our relief, reached New York, I was greatly struck with the river steamers with their machinery on deck. The river was full of half melted ice and snow. At Castle Gardens they passed me, though I had only about a dollar in my pocket, because I was booked through to friends; this in spite of my eyes.

I did not see much of New York City. I was struck most by the hideous overhead railways, with their noise and dust, and the ferry which was like the section of a street, with vans, 'buses, and other traffic standing on it. I was on top of a 'bus, but could not see the river for the high bulwarks. At Jersey City "depôt" I first tasted American "pie." It was a round, plate-shaped piece of pastry, well lined with apples or pumpkin—I forget which—and cost me five cents. Another five cents procured me two ounces of very good fine cut tobacco. Of this I was very glad. The tobacco I had bought on the steamer for ninepence the half-pound was a hard slab of

cake cavendish which had to be cut up for smoking, and was rather too strong for me then.

A night-ride through the Catskills, thinking of Rip van Winkle, regretting it was night. Then in the morning snow. Snow everywhere. More snow than I had ever seen before. We arrived at Rochester about ten. I found I should have to go by a different line to Warsaw, and it being Sunday there was no train. So an "express" man who was at the depôt took me to a hotel called the York House. Here I wondered at the meals—such a variety of dishes for each one. The waiters and waitresses laughed at me for spreading my butter on my toast. The company in the sitting-room interested me greatly. They told tall stories—mostly about women. I had a game of draughts ("checkers" in American) with a judge. In the afternoon I took a stroll round the city. The buildings I thought very fine, the cold intense. I noticed that where a house or shop was vacant, it was not "to let," it was "to rent." *Muldoon's Picnic* was billed for a theatre. (*The Two Orphans* was staged at the Brooklyn Theatre the night my father was killed.)

The next morning I was awakened at six to catch the Warsaw train. The glass was fourteen degrees below zero. My hotel bill, as I had little

money, was forwarded to my uncle, who settled it. I think I left my trunk as security.

I must speak with unstinted praise of the American railway car. One has room to move. Each contains stove, water-tank and lavatory; the windows are large and wide, so that one gets a decent view of the country; I have turned up my nose at the English railway-carriage ever since my return to this country. The car from New York to Rochester was fitted with wire-woven reversible seats, the one to Warsaw with arm-chairs fixed to the floor on twists, so that one could turn any way. More snow and miles of curious zig-zag fences. Then Warsaw.

I had always directed my uncle's letters to "Box 375, Warsaw P.O." It seems there were no postal deliveries there. If one had correspondence it had to be *poste restante*, each resident having a separate numbered box. There was no one to meet me at the depôt, as a letter I sent saying I was coming did not arrive till a day after I did, so I went to the post office and asked them to direct me to my uncle's house. Which they did. He lived about half-a-mile out of the town on a small holding of his own. On the way there the high wooden sidewalks and the children with their sleds interested me. My reading of American stories in *Young Folks*

had prepared me for a good many things I saw.

When I reached my uncle's house my aunt opened the door to me. She gave an exclamation of surprise and disappointment when she saw me. "You will never do," she said. "You are not strong enough—and your eyes!" However, she gave me an excellent breakfast.

She had only one son, and he had not done her the credit she felt she deserved. He had been a failure in England, and they had gone to America in consequence. He was, as I found, a failure there. She had hoped by getting me there to achieve some kind of social success. What it was I do not know, but she told me afterwards that she had hoped to take me out into local society, and had been looking forward to it. She never did take me, so that I saw but few of the people of the town. My uncle took me to the Episcopalian Methodist Church, of which he was an officer of some kind, one Sunday night. I thought the service dreary and uninteresting.

When my uncle came home he was disappointed too. They concluded at once that I should never do out there. They "guessed" I should never stand the climate, and the sun would be too much for my eyes. My uncle was

a Puritan of the Puritans. My only vice at that time was my beloved pipe. Smoking was a deadly sin in his opinion.

Their family lived originally at Ludgershall in Buckinghamshire. There were several sons. My grandmother told me that in their young days they were very wild. They were all big, raw-boned men, and used to play football. Every football match, she told me, used to mean a free fight afterwards. This was in the early nineteenth century. There were nine children, and their father's wages were ten shillings per week, out of which they paid two shillings rent. The sons, to add to the family's food, used to take sacks and go out at night turnip-stealing. Talking of turnips and this period, it is on record that a farmer near Eastbourne caught a poor labourer eating a raw turnip he had pulled up from a field on his way home. The farmer made the man hold the turnip above his head for an hour while he stood over him with a horsewhip, lashing him every time he lowered it. That farmer was a pillar of the Calvinist chapel. If he and such as he are in heaven, I would rather go to the other place. England under Protection—under the rule of the landlords!

To return to America. I remained at my uncle's three days. I had to dodge round behind

the "horse barn" when I wanted a smoke. They fed me well. I lived well all the time I was in America. I never sat down to tables so well spread before or since. They were loaded with so many and such good things, they recalled the Homeric feasts. Breakfast, dinner (mid-day), supper were all alike. Not in "courses"; everything, I believe, was put on the table at once, and you ate whatever you chose. My aunt had two boarders who worked in the salt wells, a local industry. They amused one with their queer yarns, intoned in their quaint voices. They had been out West, and knew things. At night I lay awake under four or five eider-downs, in addition to fleecy blankets, listening to the passing sleigh-bells. The house was on the main road between Warsaw and Wyoming, the county town.

CHAPTER VIII

AN AMERICAN FARM

My cousin hired a farm on the hills about five miles from his father's house. He worked it on "shares," finding the stock and machinery, and giving the owner a quarter of the annual produce. I walked to it through the snow the third day after my arrival. I had no money and no tobacco, so that the long walk was not cheerful. When I arrived, however, I met with a hearty welcome. The first thing I asked for was tobacco.

The *ménage* consisted of my cousin and his wife, their two children, both girls, respectively nine and eleven years of age, and the "hired man." My cousin was fond of excitement and pleasure, given to dealing rather than work. His wife was a big, buxom, jolly, good-natured, simple woman, a native of Hull. Surely no one ever made such delicious bread and pastry! Her great sorrow was that she had only girls. They were, however, bright, companionable little things. The "hired man" was named Hohenstein, an American born of Saxon parents.

He was a fine, well set-up blonde man—the ideal Saxon. He had worked in the car-building shops at Buffalo, and had left owing to labour troubles. He was a member of the "Knights of Labour." We soon became great friends. The "hired man" on an American farm occupies a very different position to that of an English farm hand. He was paid eighteen shillings per week, with board and lodging during seven months of the year. During the other five he could cut wood at eight shillings a cord. He could earn a great deal over his keep at that, allowing for impossible weather. One day Hohenstein took me down into Warsaw. He took me to a billiard saloon. There were no drinking saloons, as for the time being it was a prohibitionist county, the teetotalers having got their nominee elected as excise officer. In this saloon twopence-halfpenny was charged for fifty up or for a game of pool. There were several well-dressed men playing—men with good clothes, white starched shirts, and heavy gold watch-chains. I said to Hohenstein, "You seem to have a good many well-to-do people here?" He answered, "These? They are only farm hands, or workers in the salt wells."

The farm-house was a big, roomy, well-lighted building. Two things impressed me about it.

One was that whereas when I first arrived, and for some time after, we walked straight into the doors back and front off the snow, when the spring came the back and front doors, with the "stoop," were four or five feet above the ground. The second was that I could never see out of my bedroom window for the first few months owing to the frosted glass.

Besides the humans, the life of the farm consisted of many individuals with whom I soon became intimate. There was "Grover," the collie dog, named after Cleveland. (My cousin was a democrat in politics.) I loved Grover. He was a most delightful dog. He would join in our games, take the cattle or sheep out to the meadows or fetch them home entirely "on his own," and now and then he would take a day off woodchuck hunting. He would get his tail full of burrs and perform evolutions similar to those of a boy's top in trying to get them out. He was a lemon-and-white, about two years old.

Then there were the horses, about ten of them. One was a chestnut filly named Jenny, with a tail about two yards long, whom I broke to the saddle. Her favourite amusement was to chase the cows round the yard, gambolling like a kitten, and trying to see if she could stand on her head. Another was a mare in foal, whom

I had to gently exercise with nothing but a horse-rug on her. She had a backbone I shall never forget. I rode her the five miles down to my uncle's through the mud when the frost broke, in that same old blanket.

There were cows and heifers whom I had to currycomb every morning; fifty merino sheep looking like tabby cats or tigers in their creased wool, a curly-horned ram who was difficult to get on speaking terms with. Chickens galore, all sorts, but mostly Wyandottes and Houdans; small breeds, which eat little but lay large eggs. Red pigs, no cat. Cats and rabbits in America run very small and skinny. The woodchuck, Grover's favourite quarry, was a pretty animal with fine grey fur, a body like a rabbit, a head like a rat. Its fur is, unfortunately, useless, as all the hair falls out before it can be cured.

Laughing hyena birds and hen-hawks were the only two wild birds I noticed. There were plenty of snakes. Hohenstein ploughed up a nest of thirty-two in one furrow in the spring, and Grover killed the lot by breaking their necks with his teeth.

One thing I noticed about the people, they were exceedingly prudish. They did not call a ram by that name. I think they called it a buck. The wife of a neighbouring farmer whom

I asked whether a new-born calf was a lady or gentleman calf was quite offended. They had the biggest black-and-white pig in the county. She was boiling down maple syrup into sugar, and her husband had just shot a skunk, yet she was angry with a poor benighted Englishman for asking an innocent question!

My reception, as I said, was cordial. They gave me tobacco and promised to get me more. Hohenstein used to chew, and bought his in wooden buckets—a dollar a bucket, I think. Smoking tobacco was sold in half-pound packets at tenpence a pound, good cool-smoking tobacco such as one cannot buy in this God-forsaken country at any price. They also gave me a ripping supper.

The next day I was set to do the "chores." I got up about eight (it was in January), then I went out, watered and fed the horses, cattle and sheep, helped to groom the former, chopped wood for the stoves (only wood was burned). The wood is cut from the tree trunks in about eighteen-inch lengths and then split with an axe. After breakfast, which was always a very substantial meal, with about a dozen different dishes to choose from, we harnessed up the horses to the heavy hauling sledge and went to the woods felling trees. The ground was un-

even. We went over hedges, ditches, anything, over the deep snow, going, as Hohenstein used to say, "to hell across lots." Sometimes the sledge (sleigh, they called it), a wagon body taken from its axles and fixed on runners, would tilt over and deposit us in the snow, amidst much laughter, the horses looking round and grinning at us. Then there would be hewing, I thinking of Hawarden. We wore gloves like those made for babies in England, in which only the thumb is separate. Ordinary gloves would be useless against the intense cold. They provided me with a long pair of rubber boots, the most comfortable footwear I have ever known, and a big fur cap which came right away down over my ears. *Hein!* it was cold, but it was good to be alive.

Then back to dinner and the "chores" again. The watering of the cattle was an experience. There was an unfreezable artesian well for the horses and the house; the cattle watered at a dugout trough, the ice in which had to be chopped out with an old axe every time to make room for the water. Before the next watering came it froze solid again. The same thing happened with the long sheep-troughs.

Then a stroll to some neighbouring farm, perhaps, and supper. After supper an adjournment

to the "parlour." Here was a huge blazing stove as big, and not unlike, a large christening font in a church. Rocking-chairs; I wonder when our dull-brained countrymen will learn to appreciate rocking-chairs? On the table great pans of rosy apples and dun russets, foaming jugs of home-made dry cider—a curious drink for the winter, but sufficient in that hot room. Cards, euchre and vingt-et-un *ad lib.*, the stakes being apples. *Tiens!* If I had been strong and had had my eyes I could have lived so all my days. Of course, being a boy in America, and having read so many American stories, I had to have a revolver. This I bought second-hand of Hohenstein. It was called a "Pepper-box"—it had, not separate chambers, but four barrels, the "needle" revolving instead of the chambers, as in a modern one. I never had occasion to use it, and when I left America Hohenstein gave me a dollar for it back again.

CHAPTER IX

SPRING ON THE FARM

WHEN you see any particular heading to any of my chapters, you must not expect to get what it promises all at once. You will not always get it. You are not going to get the spring yet awhile. There are other things to be recorded. First there was a fearful storm which swept away a long row of rock elms, leaving them lying prone in the snow like a row of dead men. Then there is the winter scenery which I forgot amidst the crowding memories evoked by the last chapter.

The country was hilly, not unlike my own Sussex downlands, only instead of smooth green surfaces, the summits crowned with occasional cairns, these hills were snow-covered and cut in all directions by deep gullies called "gulfs." These again were lined with evergreen hemlocks from whose fronds the snow, and later in the thaw, the icicles glittered. Those icicles, when the thaw set in, hung from all tree branches, and from the leaves sometimes, as much as a yard long.

I was disappointed to find there was no skating or sliding, but all waters were buried deep beneath the snow. Instead, we took the sleds and tobogganed down the slopes, Grover chasing us and barking with envy at our fun. Then there was the maple tapping. Huge pans were placed under the trees and incisions made in their bark. The sap so collected was boiled till it became syrup. If you wanted sugar you boiled it still more. You have never tasted maple syrup or sugar, have you? They have the flavour of honey and something else indescribably sweet mixed together. My cousin Mary used to prepare a dish for us fit for any gods living or dead. She took fine corn-meal and boiled it as you would boil rice. Then we ate it with maple syrup and milk fresh from the cow. Does your mouth water, you grimy Londoner? Go into the Gaiety, or Romano's, or the Troc, or the Savoy, or any such place, and see if with any money you can pay you can get anything half so good.

The trees I remember were maple, iron-wood, rock-elm, slippery elm and hemlock. I remember no more. The slippery elm has a yellow viscous outer section covering a very hard red pith, the colour of raw mahogany, taking up about a third of its diameter. This red core of the tree, Hohen-

stein told me, was sometimes used by cabinet-makers, but it was difficult to work, as, besides being very hard, unless when fresh sawn into planks it was fastened out flat securely, it would coil up like a spring. The yellow outer section was damp and cool. It could, if one was very thirsty, be chewed, and in that way would relieve thirst.

At last spring came and laborious days. We cleared the barn-yards of their manure and spread it over the land. Ploughs were got out and got ready for use; the wooden roller, a solid tree-trunk chipped into form, was put in order; the wagon body was taken from the runners and replaced on its axles and wheels. The best buggy, caked with mud, was brought out and washed.

Before I quite leave the winter I must recall one day, a Sunday, I and my cousin drove to his wife's relations' farm in a sleigh. This was fourteen miles away. We hitched up his crack pair of bays. The sleigh itself was as light as a feather, as one would say, the body was of papier-mâché rounded like a bath chair, not unlike that of a bath chair in appearance, only it held two. It had a leather dash-board in front, with an iron rail for the reins to run over. The

runners were made of steel tubing. We were wrapped up to our eyes. The cold was awful. We were covered in with a buffalo-skin, our fur caps came down to our eyebrows, great woollen wraps smothered over our noses leaving us hardly room to breathe. The bells on leather belts jingled on the bays. Tree, fence and homestead flew by us like lightning. There was no sound except the bells and the faint pad of our horses' shoeless hoofs on the snow. Up and down, gliding silently, smoothly, a glide so swift that one lost one's breath.

At the farm they had to pull my boots off and put me in front of the stove; I was half frozen. My cousin's wife's mother had married a second husband, a bit of a wild man; I heard after I returned to England that he had been frozen to death. He had gone down into the town, got the worse for drink, he and his horse had fallen asleep on the homeward journey and been found frozen stiff the next morning.

I am a long while getting to that spring, I know, but I linger lovingly over some of these memories. They did not partake of the sordid everyday life in England.

When the spring did come, the sun came out hot and hot. No August we know could com-

pare with that April. The roads were a sea of mud, the fields a quagmire, but seed had to be sown and lambs and calves cared for on their entrance to this world of sorrow. My cousin and his wife watched all night for the coming of colts and calves. One Sunday morning I had the unspeakable horror of having to hold lambs while they were being mutilated. They say it is necessary. I suppose under present conditions it is, but it is horrible. It is horrible. Better far that the whole race of sheep should die and mankind exist without mutton or woollen garments than that such things should be.

The cows began to give milk and the hens to lay. I was sent out into the fields with Hohenstein to plough. I ploughed one lonely furrow, a crooked one, then I was relieved of that most useful employment. They do not plough like the English. They use a light iron instrument with nothing to change (is it coulter?—I fear I have forgotten the name of the part changed in the English plough). They plough a straight furrow, and then go round and round it till the field is ready for the seed. The horses, too, do not follow each other. They walk abreast, two or three of them, according to the weight of the soil. The ploughman has the reins fastened

behind him, so that he can move either of his hands from the plough handles to turn the horses. No ploughboy is employed.

Of the neighbouring Irish farmers who used to come and steal our corn in the night, of the two old American ladies who owned the farm on the other side of us, of many other things I must write some other day.

> "The bird of time hath but a little while
> To flutter; and the bird is on the wing."

But one thing I had to do there which I hated doing. I had to kill a kitten, a mangy, diseased stray little tortoiseshell about twelve months old. It was, I take it, a merciful thing to put an end to its misery; but I shall never forget the appealing look in its eyes, or its misplaced confidence in creeping up to me (I had been kind to it, as I am invariably to all dumb friendly things), while I held a tough bough of iron-wood behind me premeditating its death. And I shall never forget it as it lay bleeding in the snow after I had struck it one terrible—fortunately accurately aimed—blow. I have been compelled, with the utmost reluctance, to perform the same office since to stray and hopelessly useless cats, and I consider that all those who keep female cats should be compelled either to provide for their offspring or

see that they are destroyed. Only recently I have had to destroy a hopelessly unclean kitten which strayed to our present home. Apart from all questions of "tariff reform" or current politics, it seems to me that a heavy, a very heavy, tax on all female cats has become an urgent public need.

CHAPTER X

LEAVING AMERICA

One day my cousin had tapped a fresh barrel of cider. I was at work planting potatoes in the kitchen garden. You don't "dib" potatoes in America as you would in England. The season is too short. You take a broad-bladed hoe and, having well dug your plot, you draw furrows across it with one side of the hoe-blade. Then you put your potatoes in so far apart, and hoe the earth over them. Well, this potato-patch was close to the cellar door. I pride myself, having some meagre knowledge of Euclid's elements, on being able to draw a straight line. I was drawing reasonably straight furrows, but my cousin did not think so. So he took the hoe to show me how to go on. All his furrows began at their right point, and kept fairly parallel with their fellows for a time. But as he neared the cellar door they deviated considerably in that direction. After each attempt he paid a visit to the newly-tapped barrel, and returned to demonstrate again. Each attempt to

instruct me proved more and more a failure, till finally he went into the "parlour" and lay on the sofa, where he peacefully slept for a time, and I adjourned to lunch with his wife, my bonny, buxom cousin Mary. Poor dear old Mary! So patient, so kind, so good-natured! Is it not always so,—that the good women marry the bad men, and *vice versâ?* She was good, every inch of her five feet eight. Clean, active, as strong as a young mule, more tender-hearted than a boarding-school miss, clever, capable, a good cook, a good housewife, economical, a good, affectionate mother, a kind, considerate hostess. Dear old Mary! I haven't heard from her for years. I hope her after life was happy. She deserved that it should be, but one doesn't always get one's deserts in this world, if ever.

I did a considerable amount of work on the farm, so that as I only received my board and lodgings I partly, if not wholly, outset my passage money. My cousin afterwards gave up the farm and took a hotel when the county had voted in favour of licences.

I left New York on a misty day—the day the Bartholdi statue was unveiled—in June, and had a pleasant voyage to Glasgow on the Anchor

Line boat *Ethiopia*, being eleven days on the way. There were not many passengers on board. I helped the steward, and fared more or less sumptuously every day. I left my trunk behind on the quay at New York. It was forwarded by the next boat and sent on to Eastbourne, unopened even by the Customs officials. It contained one pound of tobacco, two pounds of tea, a ham, and many other good things. I went direct to Eastbourne. The railway journey was fearfully long. I left St. Enoch's, Glasgow, at two p.m., and did not reach King's Cross till four the next morning. I had to wait some time at Leeds, and should have had a look round but it poured in torrents. I have always wanted to see the north and north country towns; but that stay at Leeds, with Jupiter Pluvius very much in evidence, has been my only chance. On the way to America during the few hours I was in Liverpool I was too intent upon getting aboard my steamer to take much interest in the city. On my return I saw a little of the Clyde by moonlight and day. We landed at Greenock, going on to Glasgow by rail. In the compartment I travelled in were several of our passengers and some of the crew of the *Ethiopia*, and a discussion arose on the subject of smug-

gling. One of the sailors laughed at the idea of getting mere tobacco through. He had either some sheet music or lace—I forget which—concealed beneath his shirt. One of the passengers had some large cases of books with him. He was an author, and they were his own work.

I went back to my old lodgings, and was out of employment for some weeks. Then I got a situation as groom with an eccentric Irish doctor. I found his horses less amenable to reason than my old American friends; one bolted with me and another tried to, a third was so nervous that she would shy if any one only looked at her. My sight got me discharged, as I did not allow enough for a gatepost when I was driving a victoria. Then I found occasional jobs. One was with a second-hand book dealer. This suited me extremely well. I had always been an omnivorous reader, and minding the shop for him I had plenty of opportunities for study. In America we had *The New York World* and *The Inter-Ocean;* the only book I distinctly remember reading there was Peck's *Bad Boy*. Good old Peck! I read his *Uncle Ike* only last week and enjoyed it.

A Liberal Club had been opened in Eastbourne during my absence, and I became a

member. Here I spent most of my spare time when out of work. During 1887 I was out of work most of the time. I was employed for a while as sewing-machine agent, but could not succeed in getting sufficient orders. It was at about this time I became friendly with Ruth.

After I returned from America the first situation I had was with a furniture dealer, an ardent Liberal who had even christened his son "William Ewart." He was the most ill-tempered man I ever worked for. Do what one would one could not satisfy him. I had heavy loads of furniture to wheel to different houses on a truck, carpets and linos. to lay, bedsteads to put up, and so on, most of which, though it taught me a few things which have been useful since, were not easy work. My wages were ten shillings per week, not a very "liberal" remuneration for a lad of eighteen—as I then was. This happened in 1886, the "Home Rule" year, when Gladstone's enormous red herring succeeded so well in diverting the public attention from essential social reforms, and incidentally put a Tory Government in power for a long spell. During that winter I was part of the time with the doctor. Afterwards I earned an occasional shilling dis-

tributing circulars and so on. In July I was engaged for the first time in registration work by the Liberals, and late in the autumn I became assistant steward at the Liberal Club for the first time.

CHAPTER XI

RUTH

We had a sort of distant connection whom my grandmother visited occasionally. She was, in fact, a sister of the woman who married my grandmother's son, of whom I have written in my first chapter. Her name was Moran. She had two sons and several daughters. It was her ambition to give all her children some "genteel" occupation or profession. Thus she got one son into a lawyer's office; the younger son and her eldest daughter became elementary school-teachers; other daughters were apprenticed to the dressmaking. At this time four of the daughters had married fairly well. Three had married shopkeepers, the fourth a kind of half manager half cashier at a large drapery establishment. As the father, who had left their mother some years before I got to know them, had been only a working sawyer, when much of the timber used in building was sawn by hand, this was a typical case of a family striving more or less successfully to force its way out of the mere proletariat into the bourgeois class.

The rapid development of towns like Eastbourne enabled a great many such families to emerge from the status of wage slaves. In Eastbourne more than one man who began life at the plough-tail or with, at most, some small peddling business, has died worth a considerable fortune, so that the Lancashire saying about the grandfather's clogs might have a local variation.

Ruth was the only unmarried daughter in this particular family. She was about six months older than I was, a plump, pleasing girl with great masses of rich brown hair, rather refined in her tastes and dress, very religious, as most of her family were.

I first saw her on a visit I paid to them with my grandmother when I was a small boy living at Jevington. The younger son, Arthur, was making fireworks for the ensuing fifth of November. Ruth was sitting with her mother, who gave me, I remember, a large slice of bread and cheese, the cheese as large as the bread, which made me remember it.

When I returned from America my grandmother was still able to do an occasional day's work. She received two shillings and sixpence per week from the parish, with bread and flour, but as she paid two shillings per week rent for a small unfurnished room she occupied in a cot-

tage at Willingdon, she was obliged to work when she could get any, though she was over seventy years old. From time to time she did a day's washing or charing for Ruth's mother, who at that time lived in a small cottage on the roadside between Polegate and Hailsham. She frequently spoke to me of them, but I did not see them again until they had taken a house in Eastbourne, where she took me one evening while I was working for the Irish doctor. I think they were in low water financially, at any rate they were anxious to give up the house they had taken for something cheaper. The doctor was in need of a caretaker for a branch surgery he had, and Ruth's mother applied for and obtained the place.

From the time of this visit Ruth exercised a great influence upon me. I had met no one who had attracted me so much. As a child she had been very delicate, and had been brought up in great seclusion. She had been kept and educated at home, had made no friends outside her own family, and done nothing except the very lightest of house-work, and she fascinated me with her gentle, cultured ways.

It was proposed that she should learn the art of dressmaking at home, so as to earn something towards the family's expenses. She, her mother

and the school-teacher son Arthur had lived together up to this upon his salary, some of the married daughters contributing assistance in the way of clothing for the mother and daughter.

I left the doctor's service shortly after my first visit to them, and before they took charge of the surgery, and had entered the service of the Singer Mfg. Co. as canvasser. I was supposed to sell so many sewing-machines per week on the hire-purchase system. Ruth was one of my earliest customers, and as it was part of my duty to show her how to operate the machine, I was thrown a good deal into her society. Even after she had mastered the machine I visited her from time to time; once or twice a week, I believe, except now and then when her mother quarrelled with me and forbade me the house.

These visits were very pleasant to me. I cannot for the life of me think what we used to talk about. I was getting deeper and deeper in love with her, but I did not dare to make love to her, she seemed so inaccessible, and I was the greater part of the time out of work. I was not at all religious then. I was leading a silly, futile life, half starved most of the time, yet singing at smoking concerts and writing verses and paragraphs for a local Radical paper. Ruth told me

afterwards that she had thought me shallow, and I am not surprised at it.

Then I obtained a situation at the Liberal Club. The Morans had left the surgery and moved two or three times to different houses, at all of which I continued to visit them. I know that Mrs. Moran strongly objected to my friendship with her daughter, yet curiously enough she always left us alone together when I called, and I often stayed an hour and a half or two hours. I did occasionally make myself useful to them. During the first summer I was at the Club, Mrs. Moran had one of her prohibitory fits, and I did not call for a week or two. I was, I know, very miserable. They had taken a house near the Club where I worked, and I had to pass it two or three times a day, and once or twice I passed Ruth in the street, I *think*, either without speaking, but just "passing the time of day" at most.

But one evening she stopped me and asked me why I did not call. I told her that her mother had forbidden me the house, and she answered that I was to take no notice of her, that her brother Arthur was seriously ill with gastric fever and jaundice, and she would be glad to see me sometimes.

"But," I said, "I would rather not call, Ruth." We were walking side by side down Susan's

Road towards the house where they were then living. It was a warm summer evening. Ruth was wearing a grey "dust cloak," as it was called, and a pretty white straw hat trimmed with daisies. We walked slowly. Twenty-one years ago this August, perhaps to-day.

"But why, George?" she asked.

"Well, Ruth," I said, "it's like this. You know what I am and what your people are, and I am afraid that I am getting to care for you a great deal too much."

"I am sorry for that," she replied. "I thought so sometimes. Of course you mustn't, it is quite useless; still, you can call, and we can be friends just the same, can't we?"

Of course I ought to have been sensible and kept to the resolution I had made to try and forget her. But what lad of twenty is wise or strong when a pair of sad grey eyes he has learned to love are turned upon him? And I had dreams and ambitions even then. Who knows what might not happen some day? My love for her was very deep and very sincere; there was no room for any other woman, and having at last confessed to her, I went back to my work, like the young fool I was, tremendously happy at the slight consolation our conversation had given me.

So I resumed my visits and they became more frequent.

There was a quarrel with one of the married daughters who was about to leave England with her husband and children for Melbourne. I acted as a kind of go-between. Then when Arthur became convalescent I sat and chatted with him. He was an amateur painter, and I prophesied that he would become President of the Royal Academy and I Poet Laureate. Poor Arthur has been dead some years, and I have come to the conclusion that I have no vocation for versemaking, much less poetry, though a few odds and ends of mine have been printed and one song published with music: I have never heard of any one singing it, however.

About this time, probably through Ruth's influence, I began to attend a place of worship, going at first to the Congregational Church in Pevensey Road, and afterwards to the Calvinist Chapel. I became an ardent Calvinist, closing my mind to all the doubts I had previously entertained. Ultimately I became a member of the "Strict Baptist" Chapel. I read the Bible and Puritan and Calvinistic literature assiduously. Among the Puritans, Rutherford and Quarle are exceptionally good, as is also a writer whose name, I believe, is Dyer. In a book of

his I read far and away the most beautiful and reasonable conception of Paradise I have ever seen. I am sorry I am not quite certain of the writer's name, and have quite forgotten that of his book; it was so very good, and when I meet with a good thing I always like to recommend it to others.

Towards the end of 1888 my grandmother suggested that it would be better for her to come and live at Eastbourne, as she was getting quite beyond even occasional work, and it would be cheaper for us to live together. I slept at the place where I was employed, so I took a small unfurnished room for her in Susan's Road.

Here Ruth sometimes came to see us. She came early on Christmas morning. Up to this time I do not recollect having sent or received a Christmas card; but I bought one for her and she brought one to me. She seemed very happy and jocose that morning. As we stood together shaking hands she looked up in my face and said, with one of those winning sunny smiles she could give on occasion, "I always felt I should like to marry a tall man."

Though I am not out of the way tall—I am, or used to be, about five feet six—this remark of hers pleased me very much. She made it in a low, soft voice which made me long to take her

in my arms; but until some time after we had not got beyond a hand-shake. Afterwards she chaffed me about an Indian ink drawing I was trying to make.

This happened in my grandmother's room, which was in a house a few doors away from the one in which my mother died. This house, when we lived in it, had a large cellar under it which in the winter was frequently nearly full of water. After my mother's death it was filled with chalk. It was still occupied by our old lodgers, a bath chair-man named Cook and his wife. On this Boxing Day, as I went to my grandmother's to dinner, I saw this man cleaning the windows of his front room, and stood chatting to him some time. On my return to work I met two policemen carrying a dead body on a stretcher; they were surrounded by a small crowd. I asked who the dead person was, and was told it was my friend the bath chair-man to whom I had been speaking less than an hour before.

He had been engaged to take a lady to the Devonshire Park Theatre to a matinée performance of *Bootle's Baby*. She had been late in starting and had hurried him. He was a short, stout man with a thick neck. The approach to the main entrance to the theatre is rather steep—I find it rather a pull myself—and that, with the

hurry, was too much for the old man. He fell dead from syncope at the doors.

About this time two or three Eastbourne bath chair-men died suddenly. One named Cummings was found dead alongside his chair in the coachhouse.

Shortly after Christmas the Morans made another move, taking a house in which they had a spare room to let unfurnished. Mrs. Moran suggested that I should take it for my grandmother, which I did very readily, as it would, I knew, give me more opportunities of seeing Ruth. I helped them to move some of their things, among them a steel engraving of a woman in the nude, which occasioned my first quarrel with Ruth. She saw me looking at it and snatched it out of my hands. I made a simple remark, and she flew into a temper and would not be reconciled for several days. I said, "Don't you like me to look at it then?" She said, "I didn't mind you looking at it. I think a graceful female figure is a beautiful thing to look at; but you should not have said anything about it to me."

However, her ill-temper wore off in time. We saw each other every day, though I had to be satisfied with just talking to her and occasionally shaking hands with her. The old woman soon quarrelled with me again; and although she

could hardly forbid me the house, she would not allow me in the kitchen, so that I had to depend upon chance meetings on the landing outside my grandmother's room, or visits she paid to us, or I to her, when her mother was out of the way for my intercourse with Ruth. How long this state of things lasted I do not know, but some time that spring, 1889, a slight incident made us become lovers in everything but the *fait accompli*, which, while it might have bound us together indissolubly, would have robbed our love of its purity and Ruth of the charming modesty and dignity which were so characteristic of her.

CHAPTER XII

LOVERS UNDER THE ROSE

"At least," said Ruth one day when we were discussing the future, which meant the likelihood or otherwise of our ever being married, "if you never have me, you will always have the memories of these days."

And they were very happy days. I was very much in love, and though there was a good deal of risk in our intercourse and, of course, occasional quarrels and misunderstandings, that fact made my life during the next fifteen months full of those beautiful moments which sometimes make life worth while.

Our closer intimacy came about in this way. One afternoon I was in my grandmother's room when I heard Mrs. Moran storming at her daughter in one of her periodical outrageous fits of rage. She had probably been drinking. She was addicted to the use of Hollands gin, which she took on account of her predisposition to rheumatic gout. She died some years afterwards from dropsy and enlargement of the heart.

Hearing Ruth coming up-stairs crying, I went

to the door to condole with her. She was very unhappy, and somehow she leaned against me, and, putting my arms round her, I tried to kiss the tears away. It was the first time I had ever kissed her. I had longed for and dreamed of such a delight, but scarcely ever dared to hope for it, and now, unexpectedly, I was not only kissing her, but she was in my arms with her head resting on my shoulder. She made no resistance, but for several days afterwards she blushed every time we met and was very shy.

I had kissed a good many girls before. I kissed Ruth a great many times afterwards, and, of course, I have done the same to a good many women since; but there has been nothing before or since quite like that first kiss.

It was taken shyly, reverently, with a good deal of trepidation. I suppose most men and women who have lived and loved at all can think of at least one such occasion, which is my excuse for dwelling on it. I wonder how many girls have been driven by the unkindness of those to whom they have a right to look for kindness to even greater falls!

After this we grew more and more intimate. I was usually free from ten or eleven in the morning until seven at night, so that, as Ruth was nearly always at home, we had many opportunities.

When her mother was asleep or out she would come into our room and sit with us, at other times I waylaid her as she passed the door.

This went on for about nine months; then Mrs. Moran, in one of her fits of temper, gave us notice to quit, and we took another room in the next street. Here Ruth used to come and see us whenever she had the chance. Nearly every Sunday afternoon we sat by the fire for an hour or two locked in each other's arms; grandmother sitting at the opposite side of the fire jealous and angry. Last winter I saw a couple "canoodling" very frequently; they were so far gone that they could not restrain their caresses even before strangers—and I must admit that that kind of thing does not appeal to a third party. At any rate my grandmother used to get very cross, and after Ruth had gone I came in for a long scolding, which, I am afraid, did not worry me very much. The old lady was getting more feeble; she was close upon seventy-four, and early in the following March—1890—she contracted bronchitis, and died a few days afterwards. She was buried at Langney on a very windy day, I being the only mourner. She had always been very fond of me; no mother could have been more kind.

Previous to her death, Ruth's mother had

taken a situation as housekeeper to a gentleman who lived apart from his wife at Willingdon. Her son Arthur had one of his periodic breakdowns at the time, and stayed with them. Ruth was left in charge of the house at home. She had worked up a private connection as a dressmaker. Two rooms of the house were let unfurnished, and she had to make up the balance of the rent and keep herself out of her earnings, which were not great. We met out of doors—after my grandmother's death she would not visit me—and had long walks and talks together, usually getting to some secluded place. Sometimes she walked to Willingdon to see her brother and mother. Then I walked the greater part of the way with her, and met her again on her homeward journey at night. Once, while waiting for her, she came along with her brother. I had to get behind a hedge, and then we had to go home by the fields by Rodmell in the dark to avoid being seen. She was upset and nervous. While we were crossing a dark lonely field I was terribly tempted—but it ended at that. Then at another time there was a moonlight walk out towards Rodmell by the footpath where the King's Drive has now been made. We got off the path along under the trees by a fence. Trees and fence are still there, about half-way to Hamp-

den Park. Ruth sat on the fence and I hugged her, and we talked and talked—oh! for two hours it must have been! I suppose it is a matter of temperament, but that kind of love suited me—with Ruth. I wonder what I should have thought of her if anything had happened, whether things would have been different, whether she would have clung to me and made my life worth while, instead of the wretched muddle it has been? This thought has often troubled me, though Ruth being what she was, I do not see how anything could have happened.

Then her curious mother sent word that I was to do some work at the Eastbourne house. I was to spend three or four days digging and tidying up the garden. This with Ruth alone in the house, as the lodgers were always out. Three or four glorious bohemian days! I had no regular work at the time, and we had our meals together—just for those few days. She did not pretend to be a good cook. One day we bought the materials for a steak pudding, and she made it. I don't know why—I have never tasted a pudding like it before or since. It was like *lead*. This was the height of our intimacy. We did everything but fall. From that we were saved as by a miracle, for alone together with every opportunity, in the spring-time, our young blood

glowing——I do not take any credit to myself. I never wilfully tempted her, though we sat often for hours locked in each other's arms. I rather tried to avoid temptation and to put all evil thoughts from me. I guarded her honour even from myself as watchfully as if she had been my sister. True, we were both deeply religious, we were both modest and clean-living, but we were young and changeable. Our ideals were greater than mere respectability.

But—

> "The earthly hope men set their hearts upon
> Turns ashes——"

Even stolen pleasures come to an end. I had given up smoking for a time to please Ruth, but that was a vain sacrifice; the gods were jealous of what happiness I had, and I had enough trouble in one way and another.

One night I went to her house, but seeing lights in more rooms than usual, suspected something was wrong and did not knock. Her friends had returned suddenly from the country, and I believe I had been forbidden the house again a day or two previously. Anyway, Ruth let me know the next day. For a little while—a few days or a few weeks, I cannot remember which—we met by appointment when we could. Then getting careless by long immunity from detec-

tion, one night we were walking arm in arm jauntily along one of the principal streets when we ran full tilt into her brother. He said nothing, but passed on merely looking at us. Ruth gave a gasp of pain and fear and dropped my arm, hurrying on to the shop to which she had been sent.

And that was the end. The next morning she met me as usual on her way to work. She had given up her private work and was at a mantle-maker's at this time. Poor Ruth! she had been crying all night. She was crying then, a thick veil hiding her tear-stained face. They had made her promise never to see me or speak to me again.

Oh! the *ifs* in life! *If* I had had a good start and only fairly decent prospects in some decent trade I might have had her. Even as it was, if she had had faith in me I might have done better. I should not, at least, have lived on her as, they say, her husband did when she did at last marry. But as nothing I could say or do then could keep her to me, nothing I can say or do now can undo what has been done or recall her to me. And how I long for her sometimes! Just to talk with her, to have her confide whole-heartedly in me as she used to, to tell me all her troubles and anxieties.

I had been attending the same chapel as Ruth for some time, and had got to know the minister. In this trouble I went to him for consolation and advice. I felt I must open my heart to some one. He made me angry, very angry indeed, by suggesting that it was "just as well our intimacy had been broken off, as religious courtships often led to immorality." He was anxious to know if there had been anything of the kind between us, and I am afraid the way in which I replied made us enemies ever afterwards.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LIBERAL CLUB

In the two foregoing chapters I have spoken of the Liberal Club. After my first turn at registration work in the summer of 1888 I was out of work some time. I cannot think how I managed to live. I suppose I must have had a few odd jobs. I was turned out of my lodgings in York Road because I could not pay my rent, and took a small room in Bridge's Yard. Here I was charged, I think, two shillings or half-a-crown a week. The landlady, who used to go out to work, was very good to me, always leaving me a cup of tea and a slice or two of bread-and-butter in the morning, and giving me something to eat at night, and she allowed my rent to stand over until I got work. My days I spent looking for employment, in the Liberal Club, at my friends the Strettons', or at Willingdon with my grandmother. Sometimes I know I was very hungry, and tobacco, which was almost as much to me as food, was often hard to come by. A second-hand bookseller, who has long since been dead, gave me occasional jobs. I had attracted

his attention by buying books of him when I was in work, and selling others to him when I was hard up. Among these were my grandfather's Family Bible and Hume's *History of England*, which I parted with most reluctantly. This man was a rabid Tory, a betting man (most betting men, I notice, are Tories), and we had frequent differences of opinion on politics.

When I first became a member of the old Liberal Club it was under the management of the late Councillor Pearce—one of the Radical group on the Town Council. After a time a young married member who was out of employment was appointed steward, and he engaged me as billiard marker. With him I had to do most of the cleaning, attend to the bar during the day, and the billiard-room at night. I had one afternoon and Sundays off. The Club never opened on Sundays, which I spent with my grandmother, the afternoons with Ruth, at a place they then had at Old Town; I had just resumed my visits to her, which had been broken off for a time for some reason or other.

I tried to do my work well, and made many friends among the members. But after a time something went wrong with the accounts: something was wrong with the bar takings, and the steward tried to throw the blame upon me.

He gave me notice, but afterwards rescinded it. I was quite innocent of the charge, and I wrote a letter to Ruth telling her he had apologized—which he had—and I had been reinstated. This letter I left in my bedroom (I slept at the Club at the time), and while I was out he had the impudence to open and read it before I had posted it, and then changed his mind again and told me I was still to consider myself under notice.

Some of the members took my part, and some his. Of course, I did not like losing my work; but the accusation, while it caused me a good deal of inconvenience, did not worry me much, because I knew it was false, and I felt that somehow I should be put right sooner or later. One of the house committee took the steward's part and tried to make things unpleasant for me; but I remained a member of the club, taking part in the weekly concerts and some debates we held during the winter, and, in spite of his opposition, I was given a night to read a paper on "Unemployment," a very appropriate subject, as I was out of work myself. This man, a lithographer, with a great deal of what we call in present-day slang "swank," and the steward raised an outcry at this, as they said I was under suspicion of

having robbed the club; however, the other members took no notice of them, and I read my paper. I was not an informed Socialist then. I remember, however, I advocated a remedy which has formed the subject of an address by Sidney Webb only last week. I said that all lads should be taught a trade. Of course, I know now that, desirable as such a course would be, it would fail to solve the unemployed problem and really aggravate it in the skilled trades, but the fact that I knew no trade thoroughly myself, and was not strong enough for ordinary labouring work, had been the cause of me being out of work so much then, and has greatly hindered me ever since. Every lad should be thoroughly trained to some useful calling. The untrained young man, especially if he is not particularly strong, stands a very poor chance of maintaining himself, and had better be dead out of the way.

My leaving did not seem to benefit the club exchequer. It was found that the spirits, which should have been only fifteen under proof, had been broken down to forty-five, and that account of the wine stock had not been properly kept. So the whole staff were discharged at a moment's notice, and as I was on the premises at the time, the new steward reinstated me in my place.

The old steward blamed his wife and emigrated with his father and mother to the United States. He was not a nice man. He had been an only son, was brought up with ideas a great deal above his means, and, as I remember him, while wishing to pose and dress as a "gentleman," had the soul of a cringing cur. They had one child, which I think he took to America with him.

The club was hardly paying its way, and Dick Winder, the new steward, was not given so large a salary as the old one. Consequently he could not employ me the whole of the day, nor pay me so much as the other had done. There was a suite of rooms at the top of the house reserved for the club servants; this Dick did not want, as he kept on his house in Susan's Road, a hundred yards or so from the club; but he furnished a room for me to sleep in and paid me five shillings a week, out of which I had to find my own food. My hours of work were from 7 to 10 A.M., and from 7 to 11 P.M. Not much of a job for a young man of twenty, but better than being out of work, and I had the rest of the day to earn odd shillings in. Mr. Brown, the registration agent, who had his office on the premises, put what work he could in my way, and one way and another I managed to live, though I sowed

the seeds of chronic dyspepsia during the first part of my time there by subsisting mainly on cheap pies which a baker used to supply to the club. He let me have them at the wholesale price—two for three halfpence—and two of them (one meat and one jam or fruit) formed my dinner every day. Bread-and-butter and coffee for breakfast, bread-and-butter and tea for tea. This continued until my grandmother came from Willingdon towards the end of '88.

I was appointed collector for the Working Men's Liberal Association, and so got to know many prominent Liberals besides those who used the club. I observed that many of the loudest talkers were the poorest subscribers. One "prominent" Liberal of the rabid Nonconformist-teetotal order refused to subscribe at all because the association was guilty of the awful wickedness of holding smoking concerts in public-houses. These concerts had been a great source of pleasure to me before I was employed at the club; afterwards, of course, I could not get out at night to get to them. We had some really good singers—poor old George Holly and Jack Slaughter, a very fine tenor and baritone, and F. A. Bourne, a far better comedian than many professionals. I sang a good deal myself.

I led a curious life at the club. When not engaged in odd jobs I spent much of my time in reading. This—the earlier part of the time, before I "got religion"—consisted in the club papers, and books I had from Pulsford's Library. Of the former, I was most partial to the *Daily Chronicle*, *Punch*, *Truth*, the *Graphic*, and the *Illustrated London News*. In one of the latter I read Rider Haggard's *She*. There was a small library at the club, containing some books by Harriet Martineau, J. S. Mill on *Liberty* (which I didn't read), some Cobden Club publications, but, best of all, several of Dickens's novels in the "Household" edition. This edition, with its clear-cut illustrations depicting normal people in normal clothes—for their period—has always been my favourite, and when I get very rich I intend to possess myself of a complete set of it. I always considered that the illustrations in the older and more expensive editions were absurd, and spoilt one's pleasure in reading the books to some extent, but it would have been considered treason to have said so in those days, though others are beginning to say so now. It is the same with other literary fetishes.

I have been reading Shakespeare's Plays lately for the third or fourth time, and I cannot for the

life of me see what there is so out of the way wonderful about them. I prefer Homer. Then Scott and Thackeray I can't stand anyhow. From Pulsford's I got most of George Eliot's novels, which, with Reade's, Hugo's, Lytton's, and a few of Ainsworth's, formed the bulk of my reading. George Eliot, Mrs. Humphry Ward, and Olive Schreiner are the only three authoresses I could ever read with much pleasure.

At night I had the choice of the three rooms which formed the steward's apartments to sleep in, and I tried them all in turn. It used to be horribly cold sometimes in the winter, especially in the back-room, which faced north-west, but which I fancied for a time because I could see the Downs from the window. There were two rooms in front—one with two windows, one of which looked towards Terminus Road, the other into Langney Road. This had a bright red-and-gold paper, and had been intended as a sitting-room. The other, the smallest room of the three, faced south-east, and overlooked Langney Road. I used this the second winter I was there, when I had overcome my scruples far enough to help myself to a fire at night from the club coal-cellar, because it got warm quickest. These three rooms were shut off from the rest of the house by a

green baize door. Outside this door was the top of the stairs, with a members' lavatory on the right, and the large billiard-room facing it. This room, with its two fires, two windows, large Burroughes and Watts table and other fittings, took up a good deal of my time. It had to be swept and cleaned directly after breakfast, the table well brushed, and, in the winter, ironed. Then, too, we banked the two fires up and kept them in all night to keep the cushions from getting hard.

On the next floor below there were five rooms. On descending the stairs—which I swept every morning and cleaned twice a week—a passage led on the right to a small lavatory. On one side of this was the directors' room, which was hardly ever used except by the secretary. To the left was the card-room. This consisted of two rooms thrown into one. Scattered about it were a number of small baize-covered tables at which at night the members played whist or nap. It was said that a man had hung himself in that room years before, but that did not deter me from sleeping sound enough in the rooms overhead. Facing the foot of the stairs was the bar, a little room, with small shuttered windows looking into the smoking- and card-rooms, containing shelves

for spirits, tankards and glasses, and so on, and barrels of ale and stout. Next was the smoking-room. It had a large bay window looking into Langney Road, and contained a large number of wooden arm-chairs, with a big dining-table in the centre. Behind this, and divided from it by double doors which could be thrown back so as to convert the two into one on the occasion of a concert or lecture, was the bagatelle-room: this was patronized by those members who found billiards too expensive. On the ground-floor was the reading-room, a soft-carpeted quiet place, to the right of the entrance, and the registration-office to the left, with a large kitchen, a scullery and glass-pantry at the back. These last I had to myself.

The place is still there, the end house in Langney Road, with its upper floors covering an archway, making them so much larger than the ground-floor, but the reading-room and the registration-office have been converted into shops; and our old front gardens, with their shrubs, surrounded every spring by numbers of wallflowers, have made way for the widening of the pavement.

In the morning all these rooms had to be swept, and some one or other of them cleaned.

Dick took charge during the day—we had few callers in the daytime, as most of the members were at work or at business. Amongst those who did drop in were a few journalists, among them at one time Richard Le Gallienne, who was then on the staff of the *Eastbourne Gazette*. He was, I remember, a tall, slight, quiet man. I got into conversation one day with him about a story I was trying to write. It was my first attempt at fiction, and did not get beyond the first chapter. I found some difficulty in producing dialogue—a trouble which he told me he was subject to himself.

Another member who dropped in occasionally during the day was the late Sir John Bennet, who used to tell me of good books to read. Among them, I remember, he recommended the *Vicar of Wakefield, Tristram Shandy, Roderick Random*, and several other English classics.

But it was in the evening that the place filled. The members were mostly of the shop-keeping class, or employed in shops, though there were several working men. Two members, both old men, stand out in my memory. One was old John Vine, the father or grandfather of many of the existing Vines, whose memory carried

back to the end of the eighteenth century. He told of the "good old times," when, if poor people were lucky enough to get the flour to make a beef pudding, they had to go round Beachy Head to get the "beef"—in the shape of limpets off the rocks. Most of the time they lived upon "fromenty" and swedes. The other was the late Mr. Charles Adams, who had years before lost a good business by being boycotted for leading the local agitation against Church rates. He was noted for the grandiloquent language of his speeches, and attributed his hale old age to the fact that he invariably ate fruit the first thing in the morning before having his breakfast.

We opened at nine A.M. I used to go about my work, as a rule, singing songs, until I "got religion," when I changed them to hymns of the "Gadsby" variety, much to Dick Winder's disgust.

One of our members was Dr. Pollock, who at that time lived a few doors away. Later, when the dyspepsia consequent upon my unchanging diet of cheap pies had got so firm a hold upon me that I could scarcely do my work or even walk, I had become so weak, some medicine or advice he gave me—I can't tell which; perhaps

it was both—cured me in the course of a few days, though I had been going to another doctor for months without getting any relief. This medico was a strict teetotaler, and ordered me whatever I did not to touch alcohol in any form. I hardly ever did at this time; though I was allowed a pint or two of beer a day at the club, I seldom had it, as I did not like beer. Sometimes in very hot weather I would have a large lemonade with a very small dash—about a teaspoonful—of whisky in it to take the rawness off it, but that was the extent of my dissipation. One Whit Monday, while I was at Strettons', Horace and some of the young men I lodged with between them had made me horribly drunk, worse than I ever was before or since, so that I had to be "frog-marched" home, and that cured me of drink for years afterwards.

Besides this injunction, there were so many things prohibited — cakes, puddings, pies, pickles, jams, tea and coffee, and I know not what, that I hardly knew what to eat or drink, and I was then in a position to vary my diet, too. But Mr. Pollock, after giving me my medicine, advised me to drink two or three glasses of ale or stout every day, and eat anything I fancied and could get. This advice I

followed. I was soon free from dyspepsia, and now I can make a hearty meal off almost anything eatable—especially my favourite dish, steak-pudding—without any trouble with my stomach. Doctors are a curious lot: for one who understands and can and does really help people, there seem to be a dozen who, for what good they do, might just as well be just automatic fee-taking machines.

CHAPTER XIV

ODDS AND ENDS

ONCE when I was in London I heard the revivalists Sankey and Moody in a large building in Stepney Green. I "got religion" badly for a week or two, but soon reverted to my early agnosticism. I have never been troubled much about my "soul": I have had too much bother to live in this world to worry myself much about the next. I have no doubt I took up religion the last time to please Ruth.

Although I made myself believe in the Calvinistic tenets, I was no Antinomian—unless the following makes me out to have been one. One day—I remember it most distinctly—I was standing on the staircase at the Liberal Club looking out of the window, when a thought, a kind of proposition, seemed to fix itself in my mind. It was this: Should I, for the future, follow the strict path of duty, or should I follow my impulses?

Now, had I followed the path of duty, as I saw it, I should have had to break with Ruth. Evidently, in my position, I had no right to

make love to her, and I should have had to give up smoking, so that life would have been quite a dreary blank. So I decided definitely to follow impulse, at least in these two things.

In his *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* my wife's great ancestor John Bunyan has set the standard to which all Calvinists aspire. Unless you have all kinds of visions and torments—"experiences" as they are called —you have no marks of grace. Only the few "elect" are to be saved, all the rest of mankind are to be damned for ever and ever. Some of them have gone so far as to say that "there are babies on the floor of Hell a span long." This horrible "faith" held me for a few years, worrying myself a great part of the time trying to evoke these "visions" and "experiences" so as to know if I was one of the "elect"; but in course of time more sensible counsels prevailed, and I resumed my normal life. I must confess that my experiences and observations have led me to endorse the common view that sordid greed and nonconformity usually go together. There are, of course, exceptions. The minister of the chapel of which I was a member was a thoroughly good man, as also is one of my fellow bath chair-men, who, although he condemns my agnosticism and numerous follies,

has befriended me time after time, always ready to forgive, if not to forget, and do me still another good turn. But, then, those two men *believe* in God, to them He is the real, actual Provider who will do everything right. I have tried over and over again to fight this question out in my own mind. I have no desire to be either religious or non-religious for its own sake: I have wanted to get at the truth of it. But I suppose we never shall, and, after all, does it matter so very much? It seems to me so much better to try to make the life of the living more sane and happy than to worry about the dead. In our fields and gardens we cherish the food-giving trees and plants and the flowers, destroying the weeds; in our human society the producers and sustainers of life are despised, neglected, insufficiently nourished and cared for, while the noxious weeds flourish and fatten on them.

My Calvinism had one lasting effect: it left me a fatalist, a position my scientific reading and my own experiences have confirmed me in. "Free will" would be a fine thing—if we had any. I should very much like to be able to change my temperament, disposition and tastes for something more profitable and less liable to get me into trouble. If "conduct is three parts

of life," as Matthew Arnold says, conduct itself is determined by temperament.

My grandmother's illness gave me my first experience as a sick nurse. I sat up two or three nights with her; then she was taken to the infirmary, where she died.

Before proceeding to the time when, alas! there was no Ruth for me, perhaps some of my lady readers would like to know how she used to dress. She usually dressed in quiet colours. I do not remember many of her frocks; one I know was a medium brown with a long wide strip of gold braid running down the side of the skirt. With this she wore a big hat with piles and piles of brown ribbon on it. I think it must have been about this time that blouses first became popular. She is the first woman I ever remember to have seen wearing one. It was a red one, and with a plain dark-grey skirt she was wearing she looked enchanting in it. They were called "Garibaldis" in those days. Another hat she had, a pretty black felt shape, was trimmed with shot green ribbons, but it had, to my disgust, a little green stuffed bird on the side of it. This was the era of "dress improvers," not the big wire arrangements (they had gone out a year or two before), but the little pads worn under the skirt at the

back. The fur capes which came down to the elbow were much worn then, too; Ruth had one on when her brother brought her round to my lodgings on the night of the momentous interview after we had been discovered.

There is something more I may as well put on record here before I turn to other subjects. Some years after I was married, certainly after my daughter Mildred was born, for some reason, unknown to me at the time, though I had seen and heard nothing of my old sweetheart for years, she began to haunt my thoughts again. I thought of her continually, and had the old religious feeling come over me again. After a time I heard that she had returned to Eastbourne and was about to open a shop, under the name of "Ruth and Muriel," I think. Of course it *wasn't* "Ruth and Muriel," nor is Ruth the real name of "my sweetheart when a boy." She is still living—and one must keep one or two secrets to save one's face. I was irresistibly tempted to write to her—to tell her of myself and mine. I reminded her of an old dream she had years before. She dreamt that she saw me married to a woman whom she could not recognize, that we had a little girl, and that she would not speak to me. That dream, I reminded her, had come true in every detail.

I sent her *Clarions* and verses from Omar. Then, after the shop had been opened some time I heard she was married.

Shortly afterwards the shop was closed. Poor Ruth! I am afraid we are neither of us over fortunate.

The woman in Ashford Road who kept the house in which my grandmother had been taken ill was thinking of going to America, so I, having sold all the old lady's furniture, took a furnished lodging in a slightly better class house in a better class street.

CHAPTER XV

A YEAR OF DARK DAYS

I WAS employed at the Liberal Club for about two years. Then a new steward was appointed, a polished corner-stone of the particular religious community to which he belonged. He wanted me to work fifteen hours a day for ten shillings a week. I was to sleep out and board myself out of that. I did not like the man, and he wanted to get his brother into my place. He could not discharge me on account of my position in the party; so I discharged myself. His brother was, from his point of view, an ideal servant. He had been employed as a potman in London, working fifteen or sixteen hours a day with only one day off once a month!

During the thirteen months which followed I had only two months' work. I left the Club at the end of January 1890. My grandmother died in the March. I was parted from Ruth in the May. It never rains but it pours.

For some time, until I got something to do to occupy my mind, I walked about lonely roads and fields, feeling about as miserable as any

poor devil need wish to. Religion was precious little consolation to me, though I continued to go to the chapel regularly and read pious books. At the chapel I met a retired civil servant who lived near Eastbourne, who befriended me, giving me both money and advice. At my lodgings I tried to bury myself in the few books I had or could get. I varied the "pious" reading by going through *Paradise Lost* and the histories of France and Germany. My friends the Strettons, while they could not give me work, gave me an occasional meal.

In July and August I assisted the Liberal agent, as usual, with the registration work, looking up occupiers who had moved, getting "old lodgers" to renew their claims to the vote and "new lodgers" to fill in and sign claims. This work generally lasted four weeks and three days, and as I was paid five shillings a day it was very welcome, as it enabled me to get badly needed boots and clothing—to say nothing of regular meals.

There had originally been two registration agents employed for the Eastbourne division, but one of them had been discharged and had taken a cottage at a village called Hadlow Down, which is, I believe, about twenty miles from Eastbourne. From this place he drove

into Eastbourne two or three times a week in a spring cart with butter, eggs, poultry, pork, rabbits and other things, becoming what is known locally as a "huckster." One day, just after I had finished the registration work—that would be after August 20—I met him near the railway station, and he suggested that, as I had nothing to do, I should have a week or two out in the country hop-picking. So I gave up my lodgings, and, getting Horace Stretton to warehouse my belongings in their coach-house, pawned my Sunday clothes to raise the fare to Heathfield.

(Speaking of the pawnshop reminds me of an incident which occurred when I was a boy. We had just moved from Willingdon to Eastbourne, and the annual Sunday school treat was to be held at the former place on a Wednesday. I was very anxious to go: it was, I fancy, the week after I was discharged from my first situation; at any rate, I had nothing to do and my mother had no money. So she sent me to pawn a thick shawl she had. This was my first experience of the pawnshop. I got two shillings on the shawl, out of which my mother gave me sixpence to go to the treat. As I have had so many unkind things to say of her I am glad to have recalled this incident. I remember

that when I got to Willingdon I made myself ridiculous by affecting to talk like the town people—it was then the fad to drop all the final Rs—a fad some people still affect.)

I provided myself with a sixpenny pork-pie and some groceries to take out to Hadlow Down, but I left the pork-pie on the corner of the Strettons' piano. From Heathfield I had a long walk of seven miles to Hadlow Down. Buxted is the nearest railway station, but it is much farther from Eastbourne, and consequently costs more to reach. When I got to the village Mrs. Ashby—the wife of the ex-registration agent—said she was sorry, but she could not put me up. She recommended me to a neighbouring cottage, where the people let me have a room, and she sold me some pork for my Sunday dinner on credit. She was a very fine soprano singer and had been on the stage.

The people to whom she sent me had a large cottage standing in a very large garden, which was their own freehold property. The father was a bricklayer, working on his own account. He was very old and very deaf. There were two sons and two daughters away and three sons at home. The mother was a homely old country woman, a Calvinist: for a great many

years her brother-in-law was a leading minister among the Strict Baptists.

I did not commence hop-picking until the following Thursday. On the Wednesday I walked down to East Hoathly, where there were anniversary services at the Calvinist chapel. On the way there I passed a beautiful house occupied by a Mr. Smith, a member of the firm of coal merchants of which Mr. Compton Rickett, M.P., is a partner. I had to walk back in the dark and it rained steadily all the way. The road wound through woods—there is a place called "Black Boys" on the way, probably a corruption of "Black Bois," as this was formerly a very heavily wooded country forming part of Ashdown Forest—and the drip, drip of the water from leaf to leaf was weird.

As on my earlier experience at Wadhurst and Mayfield, I picked hops on two different farms, but I earned hardly enough to keep myself and pay my lodgings. I had to borrow half-a-sovereign from a friend in Eastbourne. To get this I had to go down by train, and Horace Stretton's wife—he was then married—gave me two nights' lodging and my food, for which she would not let me pay her. The friend who lent me the ten shillings was Henry

Bradford, the Baptist minister, one of the very few Christians I have met worth the name.

In spite of this little trouble, and though I was still miserable on account of Ruth, and part of the time suffered agonies from the toothache which I had contracted through breaking a tooth on cracking a hazel nut, the month I spent in this village was an interesting time. The cottage where I lodged stood on sloping ground facing south. Of the three sons at home the youngest was a school-boy, the pet of the family; the second was rather ill-conditioned and quarrelsome; the eldest rather a nice young fellow, who had worked in Eastbourne; he was fond of shooting, and some years afterwards lost a hand through an accident with his gun. The mother, who like the rest was engaged in the hop gardens, wore a large brown sun-bonnet. When I went home one night, when I had been there about a week, I saw some one wearing such a big brown bonnet stooping over the stove lighting the fire. I thought it was the old lady, instead of which it was a very young and very handsome one. One of the daughters, the only unmarried one, had come home from service.

I give her the name of Lois. She was a fine type of rustic beauty, fair, full-figured, a

"Venus de Milo." She attracted me at once, but not enough then to make me forget Ruth. We had a few walks together; in the retrospect I am inclined to think her a bit of a flirt. One walk we had with her youngest brother to see some interesting people who lived in an old cottage some distance away. They had "seen better days"; there were several children nearly grown up, one daughter quite.

They had come from Brighton, where some misfortune had befallen them—I think their father had deserted them and their mother to go off with another woman—and they stood at the next bin to mine in the hop gardens. I gave, or lent, one of them a book on astronomy I had with me.

After Lois came home we had some pleasant evenings. She brightened the place up; some girl friends came in occasionally and there was some singing—hymns, of course. I occupied a room on the ground floor opening on to the kitchen. It had the finest bed in it I have ever slept on, a great down one into which one seemed to sink. On week days we were up at five in the morning to get to the gardens, where we worked from six in the morning till half-past five at night. I usually went home very, very tired, but after a cup of tea and a rest was fresh

enough for a long walk, gathering blackberries or hazel nuts.

Then followed a visit to Tunbridge Wells in search of work—a vain search, of course. Here I saw Mr. Brown's, the Eastbourne Liberal agent, family; they lived at Southborough, and gave me a nice tea when I called. They were Strict Baptists like myself, and I remember a daughter regretting that one of her brothers had "gone over to those wicked Socialists." I had heard of only one Socialist previous to this, a workman who had come to Eastbourne for a time and had refused to support the Liberals.

From Tunbridge Wells I tried to walk to Hastings, but night coming on and being penniless I turned back to Wadhurst. I don't think I ever felt more utterly despairing than I did that night, everything, in every direction, seemed quite hopeless.

At Wadhurst I called upon a Rev. Mr. Winslow, a Calvinist minister, a connection, I believe, of the Forbes-Winslow family. He lent me two shillings on a book, *Hawker's Portions*, I had with me (Ruth had given me that book the previous year as a birthday present). I lodged at a coffee-house in Wadhurst that night and the following day walked into Hastings, getting there very late at night after my cousin

Harry and his family had gone to bed. But he got up and gave me some supper and a night's lodging.

The next day I walked by way of Winchelsea and Rye to Lydd. Across Romney Marsh it rained—a steady drizzle. It was dark when I got into Lydd. I had no money, but I sold a knife or something I had for the price of a bed, and slept at a small cottage, leaving some religious book I had behind, as the people were very kind. It seemed useless to go on any further, so I returned that day to Hastings and the next to Eastbourne, walking all the way. My old landlady in Bridger's Yard put me up for a few nights, and Nash, at the "general" shop in South Street, let me have some food and tobacco on credit. The walk from Hastings into Eastbourne was memorable. I was hungry, and ate all the few blackberries I could find on the bushes as I crossed the Crumbles. I had no tobacco, and I burnt a hole in a wooden pipe I had trying to burn the dust I could scrape from the sides.

CHAPTER XVI

I ADOPT MY PROFESSION

WHATEVER significance there may be in the number thirteen, I have reason to remember it. Ruth's birthday is on the thirteenth of the month. I was parted from her on the thirteenth of May. (I lost one of my numerous chairs on the thirteenth of another May—1907), and I sank to the "profession" of bath chair-man on the thirteenth of February 1891, eighteen years ago to-morrow! Also I received the letter which announced the acceptance of this book by its publishers on the thirteenth of November 1909.

I say "sank" advisedly. Rightly or wrongly, I had always considered bath chair work beneath me, and bath chair-men, as a class, disreputable. Probably I was imbued with some of Ruth's "genteel" ideas. I have seen since that it would have been a very good thing for me if I had filled in my spare time during the two summers I was at the club with a chair. There was very good money indeed to be earned in those days, and even if my earnings had not enabled me to get a chair of my own, they would have made

my grandmother's last days more comfortable. It was quite the usual thing for men to earn over two pounds a week all through August and September *then*. But now!

The way I came to take out a licence at last was this. I knew an old bath chair-man at Old Town, a Liberal friend of mine, and while warning me that at that time of the year I could not expect to earn much money, he suggested that it would be better for me to have a try at the work than go week after week standing about doing nothing. Superintendent Newnam had known me for years, and I readily obtained my licence. I started with an old-fashioned lever spring chair, not a very good one I am afraid, but I happened to get two or three regular customers and did very well the first year. People should only follow chair work for one year, as I notice that almost every one does better the first year than they do afterwards.

After a week or two I overcame my aversion to my new employment. It was something to do, anyway, and I earned money nearly every day. Having had to go on short commons for a long time previously I found it very tiring at first, but I did not mind that. Buoyed up with hope of success, I wrote to Ruth's brother asking that we might become friends again—not that we

should be engaged, but that I might see her now and then. These letters made him very angry and gave rise to scenes at home, so her mother told Ruth to write to me making an appointment with me in Water Lane. Here I waited for her late one evening, and she came tripping along like, as I thought, a very fairy. We had a long talk—she begged of me not to write to her brother again, but to work and wait patiently, trusting in God. It was our very last walk together. Later in the year she, having left the shop at which she worked the year before, used to go to a house in Upperton Gardens, where she had a private customer. She took me quite by surprise by speaking to me one day at the corner of the street where I used to stand with my chair. We spoke once or twice more as she was going or coming from this place; then she told me we mustn't speak any more, there were too many "newsagents" about, and I have never heard the sound of her voice since. I have seen her once, the day before I attended the Tunbridge Wells conference of 1907, which crowned the political work I have achieved—up to now. I had taken a lady in my chair up to the Old Town to look at the church. While she was inside Ruth came out of a house opposite and paused a few moments on the pavement looking

across at me. I longed to speak to her, but I hardly knew how she would receive me. I have caused her, I am afraid, a good deal of trouble, and I expected my fare to come out of the church every moment. I know I felt infinitely sad. Then last autumn, when I had been very ill, I took my little daughter one Sunday up into South Fields for a walk. I had to walk very slowly on account of my extreme weakness, I remember, and on the way we passed a woman with a child in long clothes in her arms. I thought it was Ruth, but she had a large hat on and held her head down so that I could not see her face.

During 1891 and 1892 I still attended the chapel regularly. I hired my first chair on the understanding that I should "pay in" a quarter of my earnings. This often amounted to 6*s*. 6*d*. or 7*s*. Then I hired a cee-spring chair, for which I paid 6*s*. per week, and left the Upperton district, where the work had slackened, to ply for hire on the Front near the Grand Hotel. Here I had a good season, earning, for me, wonderful money. I borrowed the money of a local loan society to buy a chair, but I was taken in over it: it needed so much repairing I had to get rid of it the next year and go on hiring again.

During my first year at chair work we had two

great storms at Eastbourne; one a blizzard with much snow early in March; the other a tremendous gale in November. During the latter a chimney blew down at a house in Lismore Road. It crashed through two floors and killed the cook while she was dishing up the luncheon in the kitchen below. I was outside a few minutes after while they were trying to get the body out from under the débris. This was a storm and no mistake. It was almost impossible for one to keep one's footing in the streets.

I did fairly well up to Christmas. I was lodging with a man who had the laziest woman for a wife that I have ever seen. Some years afterwards she met with a tragic end. She was burnt to death while lying in bed reading *Tit-Bits*. Another landlady used to pawn her husband's clean linen for drink. Another, a member of the chapel I attended, was so particular one didn't dare drop a crumb on the floor.

The following year I did indifferently well all the spring with my chair. The general election "arriving" in June I was glad to give it up for a time. I was employed as clerk at the central committee rooms at five shillings per day. During this time I suppose my religious scruples were giving way. I know I read Carlyle's *French Revolution* and Eugene Sue's *Wandering Jew*

while at the political work, though all this year I attended chapel regularly and did not work on Sundays. If I had customers who rode on Sundays I always got some one else to take them, and lost two or three thereby. I had been baptized the previous year and made a member of the chapel.

After my last interview with Ruth I made up my mind to try to forget her in the company of others. I walked out a few times with a cook, a fellow member of the chapel, who gave me the sack because I would not sit down in the corner of a field near Rodmell with her. Then Lois wrote to me to visit her at Hadlow Down one week end. She went into service at Ivy House, Ore. Here, while I was "electioneering," and afterwards while I was at work in the Liberal agent's office, I used to visit her on Sundays. I am afraid I spent a good deal of money on her. She was a fine-looking girl to be seen with, and I thought it worth while. We had some fine walks together about Hastings.

Then she began to have scruples. She had an old lover in Canada, a pastry cook, and she thought she "was not doing right by him." There was another girl named Louie in the house, a frail, fair girl, very vivacious. I transferred my affections to her, but after we had

corresponded and kept company for a time she took a fancy to a postman and gave me up in his favour. She discovered afterwards that he was married.

The time at the election committee rooms, where I had some enjoyment in long tricycle rides I had to take into the country, and the fun we had with the opposing party, with the five weeks or so in the registration office which followed, made me reluctant to return to the chair work of which I was already heartily sick. But needs must when the devil drives. I had nothing else to do, but I had become unfitted for it, and having only a very poor chair to work with I made a bad season.

It was about this time I became a Socialist definitely. I had a copy of *Looking Backward* given me, as well as Morrison Davidson's *Old Order and the New*, and my faith in the Liberal party was undermined. Advertisements in one of these books led me to subscribe to the *Clarion*, *Justice*, and the *Workman's Times*. I drifted farther and farther away from orthodox Liberalism until, holding open-air meetings in the spring of '93, at which I advised my hearers to help form an I.L.P. group, I was expelled from the party. I had been on the executive committee and the district council, and Mr. Brown had

promised me that had Admiral Brand, the Liberal candidate, been returned at that election, I should have been appointed permanent assistant registration agent at a good salary.

The winter of '92–3 saw the decline of both my religion and morals. The morals went first. Lois had just given me my *congé*. I was either out of work or doing very little. I was intensely depressed, and I happened to be alone with a girl who had been "chasing" me. It seemed ironical that while the girls I wanted—usually fair ones—eluded me, girls I didn't by any means want were always after me. This was one of them. I "took advantage" of her. It was the first time I had known a woman, and for days afterwards I was overpowered with a sense of shame and of something lost.

I was having a very bad time in every way. Try how I would, failure and disappointment met me in every direction. It was to some extent my own fault. I had always been so short of money that when I did get to earn fairly large sums I couldn't take care of it. The luxury of having more than was absolutely necessary to keep body and soul together proved too much for me. Besides, even when I was trying to forget Ruth in the company of other women, the thought of her rankled.

My old agnosticism began to reassert itself. The Calvinistic doctrines began to present themselves in all their naked absurdity. I began to question the justice, and afterwards the probability, of people being brought into this world without their consent to suffer long years of worry, pain and misery here and endless torments hereafter. My Socialism made me more humanitarian, and I wanted to live a fuller life than the bondage of religious tenets would permit. Carlyle and Sue had whetted my appetite for more secular literature.

I continued my daily prayers and my attendance at chapel for some time; then I communicated my doubts to my friend the deacon and the minister. My letters were read before the assembled church, and I was suspended from my membership. There was some talk of, and I had hoped for, my becoming a minister in time. If I could have repressed my doubts, continued to make a profession of religion, and acted with a little "worldly wisdom" I could have made my way very well. As it was I lost some of my best friends. Similarly, if I could have concealed the change in my political views and remained with the Liberals my knowledge and experience of political work would doubtless have procured me some advancement in time.

In the following spring I made another attempt to get work in London, but failed. I sank so low whilst I was there I had to go into a Salvation Army "elevator," and a horrible place I found it. I got in touch with the S.D.P. and the Fabian Society, however, during this visit; for the latter I sold pamphlets at the Eight-Hour Day Demonstration on May Day. John Burns and G. B. Shaw were speaking there. I paid the latter the money I had received for the pamphlets, and he put it into his pocket without looking at it. And I was literally starving![1] A distant cousin helped me to return to Eastbourne, where I organized a local Fabian Society and several open-air meetings. At these I had as principal speakers H. R. Smart and John Ward. A local publican, accompanied by a lot of drunken roughs, tried to break up one of our meetings on the Wish Tower grounds. He has since lost his licence—through no good conduct, you may be sure.

[1] A friend thinks this reference to G. B. S. unfair. It is not intended to be so. The point is, I might have kept some of the coppers and he would not have known.

CHAPTER XVII

THE CURSE OF CASUAL EMPLOYMENT

WITH short intervals when I could get no chair to draw, I have been at chair work ever since, with varying luck. I have had some good customers—the late Hon. Walter Bateman Hanbury, with whom I earned seven pounds in a fortnight, and his aunt, Lady Northwick of Worcestershire. These were both ideal kindly aristocrats, considerate, genial, paying well. I shall never forget the Hon. W.'s pleasing pensive face. He had been for some years ranching in South America. He had entirely lost the use of his legs, and had to be lifted in and out of the chair. He employed me for two seasons. Then his lady friends persuaded him that I was not strong enough, or could not see well enough, or charged too much—anyway the following summer he brought his own private chair and his man had to draw him about.

He gave me the best dog I ever had, an Aberdeen terrier. But more of this quaint animal later on.

I have had other good customers from whom

for a time—a few days, or a few weeks it may be—I have earned good money. But these are few and far between. As a rule the life is a long state of worry, debt and despair. Day after day, week after week, always "hoping for something to turn up" which seldom or never does turn up, one drags on, getting deeper in debt, and in consequence a worse name with chair-owners, landlords, tradesmen.

Till the motor came we could look forward to doing fairly well in August and September, and so being able to pay off old scores. But now we do rather worse during the summer season than at other times. I am writing this on the 19th of August, 1908. During the month so far I have earned only one casual shilling. I have a small contract job, but I am free from twelve o'clock every day. And the other men are standing about in glum hopelessness.

Sometimes there are a few jobs at the Grand Hotel, then one will get up there before six o'clock to get "first turn," standing there till eleven before there is any likelihood of work. I have done this many a time in the depth of winter. The rule is that if you get out early in the morning to get a stand, you must not leave your chair for any length of time until dinner time. Some of the bounders, however, do not

keep this rule; they slip away for an hour or so to breakfast. One of them was fined for that last autumn. The police, however, only worry us by fits and starts. Some one goes to the Town Hall and complains that they found some chair unattended when they wanted to hire it; then we have to be careful for a week or two. As a rule we do not leave our chairs for long: we are most of us too anxious to get work. Occasionally a man having extra money from some source or other will leave his chair to sit in a public-house, but this does not occur very often. As I rule—I have noticed it hundreds of times—one may stand by one's chair for hours without moving and get no call, then directly one goes away, even if it is only for a few minutes, a customer comes along. It is part of the general cussedness of things.

If you would know the horror of black despair go out with a bath chair day after day, with chair-owner or landlord worrying you for rent, food needed at home, and get nothing. Stare till your eyes ache; pray with aching heart to a God whom you ultimately curse for His deafness. And this not for a few weeks, but year after year.

Among the chair-men I have known since I first began to work at the calling seven have gone

mad, many have taken to drink, others have died in the workhouse or are there still. The work demoralizes every one in some way. It sets man against man. Some will do the meanest things to get work away from others. For instance, men have gone to my customers and told them I could not see, or that I was a Socialist, or that I drank. It is quite a common thing for me to get customers and suddenly lose them. One of the men tried to get the contract work I was doing last year away from me by telling the lady I was a Socialist, but she happened to be that *rara avis* a sensible woman and took no notice of it. In fact, she gave me some of Mr. Wells's books, besides some of the R.P.A. cheap reprints.

While demanding the strength of a man, chair work does not enable him to live and pay his way honestly, even if he has a chair of his own, unless he has some other source of income. It is suitable for pensioners or those who can find employment at house or other work in their spare time. These jobs used to be common years ago, but since Germans are cheap and have become commonly employed by boarding- and lodging-house keepers, they are not to be had. Reservists in the German army are being maintained here, and they keep Englishmen out

of employment in towns like this where there are hundreds of unemployed. They sleep in the pantry with the food, the scullery, or even the coal-cellar. Some of them get up early in the summer-time and bike round the country. If ever they have occasion to use it, they will have greater knowledge of our roads than we have ourselves.

Since I first began work as a chair-man I have done my level best to get additional work. I did the housework of two schools during one year—while the South African war was on. But some one else wanted the work, and offered to do it for less money. Then I had a turn *devant les scènes* at the local theatre. I have tried window-cleaning, everything I could think of to fill in the blank hours, but always some one else has wanted the work and edged me out of it. Eastbourne is one of the loveliest pleasure towns in England. It is the paradise of the idle and sometimes vicious rich, the rest-place of jaded well-paid workers; but it is a hell to the poor who try to live in it by casual labour.

In my early chair days our fare was a shilling per hour. We used to charge one-and-six where we could get it, but we were liable to be taken from our stands and paid off with a shilling. But in those days there was more demand

for us, and we made our own terms when we could.

Our wooden-headed town council objected. Of course we have a wooden-headed set of town councillors, or we should not be like other boroughs. So I called a meeting of the chairmen and we organized ourselves into a union, each man paying a penny a week. We held meetings, worried and threatened the obsolete lot of prehistoric specimens who ruled the town, until they gave in. I have gratefully to acknowledge the help of one councillor, a local architect, a Calvinist, and a gentleman. A year or two later when he had to stand for re-election he was defeated. Some of my lovely fellow chair-men voted for his opponent because he was a Conservative. I suppose some rabid politicians would give their suffrages to Old Nick in opposition to St. Michael if he ran for their party.

To the ordinary workman one shilling or one-and-sixpence per hour may sound extravagantly high pay. He must bear in mind that, taking the weather and slack times into consideration, if we do on an average two hours' work a day we are very lucky indeed. And then if we hire our chairs there are four or five shillings a week to pay for them, and if they belong to us it costs something for coach-house and repairs.

The chair rent was originally six shillings for the summer, four shillings for the winter per week. An agitation which I joined but did not lead got the summer rent reduced to five shillings. Four shillings all the year round or sixpence a day would be amply sufficient to cover cost of repairs, coach-house, etc., and leave a fair profit, because no one buys a brand new bath chair to let out. They are usually old and half worn out. I know cases in which the annual rent exceeds the first cost of the chair to the owner.

Naturally the owners are a pretty hard lot. They could not continue to own chairs and make them pay if they were not. I have gone to the coach-house and found the handle taken off my chair when I have been less than five shillings behind with the rent.[1] They do not give you notice. They slip round to the coach-house early in the morning or late at night after you have put the chair away, take the handle off, and then the next day go and brag about it amongst the men, to show how big they are and to intimidate others who may be working for them. One day one of them served me this trick. It had

[1] Since writing the above I hear that Judge Emden has decided in the Tunbridge Wells County Court that this is illegal and awarded damages to a chair-man against a chair-owner guilty of it. When the chairs are hired by the week, a week's notice should be given on either side.

been a very dull time, and I had my daughter lying ill with whooping-cough. Instead of paying him that week, what money I had earned had gone for medicine and doctor's fees. I told him so, and he said he couldn't help my sick child: he wanted his rent. Another one, when I told him that my boy was dead, exclaimed, "A good job too! Now you'll be able to pay for your chair." I had paid that man over thirty pounds for a chair that cost him only twenty-five, and I owed him less than thirty shillings. They always remember what you owe, but forget what you have paid.

One man who had my nose to the grindstone in that way was a coachbuilder. I had returned from my tour on behalf of the Socialist movement to find every chair in the town let. I was out of work three or four weeks, but though my wife kept me out of her poor earnings as an ironer, I was not sufficiently demoralized to want to keep on living on her. So I searched and searched till I heard of his chair. He left things in the hands of his sons, being too old to manage them himself. There were four of them. The eldest, a quiet, dreamy painter, fond of doing artistic work; the others, one, the smith, a member of our fashionable church choir, another an ardent Salvationist, the last the book-keeper.

The chair was an unpopular one. One of the Brighton shape which may be *de rigueur* in Brighton, but is not well thought of here.

Anyway it was my only chance, so I took it. I had been agitating for lower chair-rents for some time, and the owners generally had made a dead set against me. Besides, I owed most of them a few shillings. Having paid nearly two hundred pounds in rent during the past seventeen years, ten pounds would cover all my liabilities to them.

The coach-builder expected me to pay just the same rent for this chair as though it had been one of the smart popular Bath type. However, I didn't and indeed I couldn't keep him paid regularly. The book-keeping son and the smith kept me pretty well worried between them. At last it happened I got some contract work, ten shillings per week for one hour a day. After a time, as it appeared likely to last, I suggested that the lady should buy the chair for me, and instead of me paying rent for it she should stop four shillings per week out of my money until it should have been paid for, which she did. Unfortunately she was only able to get out once a day, and the money I received was necessarily inadequate to meet my ordinary expenses, but she was a kind, genial old lady, and her

daughters and the housekeeper, who transacted all the business, were very kind to me. Unfortunately it did not last. I fell ill and the lady moved to Brighton, so they very considerately repaid me the few pounds I had paid on the chair and it was sold.

Unfortunately at the time of writing I am still cursed with this casual employment. If there was a God I would pray earnestly and fervently that He would save every man and woman who reads this from that curse. Better be dead and buried out of the way than live so. Blessed are the dead! they are no longer hungry, nor have they rent to pay. Other workers in Eastbourne —porters, cabmen, taxi-drivers and so on—lead similar lives. A company came here recently to run taxi-cabs. I envied the men who could see to drive motors, but not for long. These poor devils have to pay in seventy-five per cent. of their earnings, and the rest is swallowed up pretty well in garage fees. Do you wonder I am a Socialist? Only by the well-ordered combination of the workers as a class-conscious body grounded scientifically can we ever arrive at a better condition of things.

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CHAPTER XVIII

THE BRIGHTER SIDE OF CHAIR-WORK

I HAVE told you some of the sorrows of our occupation, and of one or two of my decent customers who made things well for me. Now for a time I must try to tell you of the brighter side, which balances to some extent the dark. Hitherto, I do not mind telling you, I have written under great pressure, and with a certain amount of mental and physical distress. I would be glad and grateful if I could finish this work leisurely and free from worry. After all, I am trying to tell a man's story of his own life and experience as simply and truthfully as I can.

What, then, has been the bright side of my work? By nature I am happy and fond of enjoyment. I sing and tell stories, love music, humour and good books. *Mein Gott!* but if I had only a fair chance of living a decent life, how I should live!

When things go well (as they do sometimes), we can go out in the morning, knowing we have a decent day's work before us, free from worry. If we have engagements we need not hurry out

early, we can take our time; there is no master or foreman to interfere with us.

Sometimes we get customers for whom it is a real pleasure to work. I remember several very nice people. There was one elderly gentleman who suffered with sciatica. He was very wealthy, and always paid two shillings for every hour. He had a very pleasant manner, and would sit by the sea and talk with his chair-man in a kindly, unaffected way. Then there are the surprises fate springs upon one. I had been doing very badly for a long while, when I got the customer of whom I have been writing. Something induced me to move from one unlikely stand to another at an unlikely time of the morning, but the under-gardener, who had been sent to get a chair, called me from this stand because I was by myself, and, in consequence, I had six weeks' very good regular work, earning over two pounds a week. At another time—in December—I had waited on a stand near the Grand Hotel till nearly twelve o'clock. Thinking I would try another at the end of Wilmington Square, I made for it by way of Jevington Gardens. Here I was hailed by a young lady and taken to Elsing Lodge—a house in Grange Road, to take her mother out. I had that lady once or twice a day for nearly two months. Her

husband had been, at one time, head-master of Cheltenham School, and she had a young daughter—a girl of fifteen or so—who was a clever "trick" bicycle rider.

One evening when the King—then Prince of Wales—came to Eastbourne to open a cattle show, a lady engaged me to take her to see him pass from the railway-station to Compton Place, where he was staying for the week-end with the late Duke of Devonshire. We were only an hour and a half gone, but when I took the lady back to her house she said, "I must give you something extra, as this is a special occasion." She put some money in my hand, which I did not look at until I had got back on the stand. I thought it was probably two and threepence or half-a-crown; but when I came to look at it I found it was six shillings.

One Sunday in June, a few years ago, I had stood from eight in the morning till eight at night on the corner of Wilmington Square without earning a penny. I was pretty low-spirited. I was hiring my chair from a very hard man, and I had no money for him or myself either. As I pulled off the stand to go home, a gentleman called to me. I hoped he wanted to engage me, but he only wanted a light.

"Very busy?" he asked.

"No," I said; "I'm sorry to say I've been here since eight o'clock this morning and haven't had a job."

"That's hard lines," he said; "here's half-a-crown for you. Are you married?"

"Yes," I said, thanking him.

"Any children?" he asked.

"Yes," I said; "one little girl."

"Oh," he said, putting his hand in his pocket, "here's another five shillings!"

At another time—this, too, was in June—I had not been off for five days, and they were fine days, too. My wife was working at a laundry where she could not get her wages till Monday or Tuesday. On the Saturday afternoon she came up to me on the front, near Lansdowne Terrace, to see if I had the money to get our Sunday's dinner. When she found I had had no work I suppose she looked blue; anyway, a gentleman came up to us and asked us what our trouble was. We told him frankly, and *he* gave us seven and sixpence.

Once, at the end of a bad January, I was called to a house in Wilmington Square to take a lady out. She took a fancy to my chair, and I had her every day for a week, earning over two pounds. This was Mrs. Inman, of the great steamship company in one of whose vessels I

had crossed to New York. As the author of the *Blue Moon* is so fond of saying, "You never can tell."

There have been other good customers besides those I have mentioned. There was Mr. W——, who paid with a princely hand, but who has since lost his money, and, I believe, died in an asylum. There were many other ladies and gentlemen who treated me well. Chief of these is Mr. O——, the head of a great industrial concern, who has befriended me again and again when I have been in need. Some day, when I am free from this morass of poverty—if I ever am—I will write more freely of him.

And the nurses. I must not forget the nurses, bless them! with their cheerful faces and genial ways. First there was a great Scotswoman, with rich blonde hair, in attendance on a poor frail girl of sixteen who had overgrown herself. She was a symphony in living flesh, glowing kindly, sunny. Then I remember a little red-haired fairy of an Irish nurse, a little thing who flitted about doing things and doing everything well—cheerful, dainty. She was in company with one of the alleged "smart set," a woman who wanted to flaunt up and down the parade in her chiffon and feathers making eyes at every one and talking silly. Showing off,

anxious only to be looked at and admired, a *poseur* of *poseurs*. This nurse was strong, and used to tell her patient not to be or talk so silly.

I have not met a bad or disagreeable nurse. Will the profession accept my kind respects? When I come to die, which I suppose it is just possible I shall do some day, let me have a nurse near me who has been in long training. I want neither doctor nor parson. The first know little of what they profess to know, the latter nothing.

And one gets always the fresh air.

If these memories are not finished artistically, and if they seem to jangle, you must bear in mind that I am writing them in the intervals allowed me by my trade. I am not sitting at rest. I have a great chair weighing about three hundredweight to draw, and I am not strong.

The chair I had last year was in a frightful condition when it was bought for me, but, having re-lined the body and varnished it, I made it quite passable. Some of the men varnish their own chairs, and make an awful mess of it. Owing to hints received from a coach-painter or two, I did mine fairly well for an amateur. To those who wish to use carriage-varnish, get all the old varnish off with pumice-powder, then get every grain of the pumice powder off. Begin at the bottom, so that your varnish flows down-

ward, covering your brush-marks. It must be done in a warm, dustless place, and should be on a bright, sunny day.

However, my advice to those who feel inclined to be bath chair-men is like *Punch's* advice to those about to marry. You had better go into the workhouse, or do something to get yourself a long spell of penal servitude.

I have met but few chair-men of whom I could make friends. Those I have to speak of in another chapter I knew in my younger days, and their friendship was a doubtful blessing. One or two stand out above the rest, however. There is one little religious chap who, in spite of his limitations, is a thoroughly good one. They are, on the whole, a queer lot: broken-down tradesmen, retired soldiers or sailors, men of every description who have failed at everything else, or have been chair-men so long they are unfitted for any other calling. Though there are exceptions, "once a chair-man, always a chair-man" holds good in most cases. Two of our queerest specimens we owe to the *petit bourgeois*. One is a qualified chemist, the other a grocer; but while one has always been a teetotaler, and the other nearly so, they have some characteristics in common. They are always in trouble. They can do nothing efficiently—except talk—not even

shut a door after them. Any one more hopelessly helpless and futile it would be difficult to find.

It has been my habit for a good many years to stand at the corner of Wilmington Square. Here there are a number of luggage-porters, most of whom, as a rule, earn more money than we do, and have often made me regret not becoming a porter instead of a chair-man. But they are not always "flush." One winter I remember, on a bitterly cold day, there were four of us—two chair-men and two porters—standing about that corner. We had been there all day, and hadn't the price of a drink between us, when a gentleman came along, and "Bummer"—one of the porters—went up to him and asked him how he was "fixed for coppers." "All right," he said. "Let's see; there's four of you," and he gave "Bummer" sixpence. It was the Chief Constable!

CHAPTER XIX

"DEVANT LES SCÈNES"

ONE night, about nine months after I was married, I was sitting in the old bar at the Devonshire Park drinking a glass of stout, and wondering where I was going to find my week's chair-rent, when Frank, the property-master at the adjoining theatre, came in and asked if any one there would like a job "supering." I had agreed to pay six shillings a week for the chair I was drawing at the time, and though it was in May, it being the year when the water went wrong at Eastbourne, things were very, very quiet. So I, and a luggage-porter who happened to be there, promptly volunteered.

The play was *The New Barmaid*—one of the first, if not the first, of the musical comedies which was being produced at the Devonshire Park Theatre. In the first act we appeared as policemen: it was our duty to "raid" a club and arrest a number of young ladies dressed unconventionally, but very neatly, in short dress-jackets, black satin knickers and black stockings, who entered into the spirit of the thing by knock-

ing our helmets off and generally ill-using us, thus anticipating the "new women" of to-day. My own particular amazon, who looked remarkably well even at close quarters in her boyish dress, must have been an athlete—she sent my heavy helmet across the footlights into the orchestra with one blow at each performance. In the second act we simply lolled at the back of the stage in somewhat dingy boating gear. Neither at this time nor subsequently have I ever experienced "stage fright" or nervousness before the audience, though once, when I had a line or two to speak with Norman V. Norman's company in *Nell Gwyn*, I "dried up."

The following week I was given a small speaking part in a curtain-raiser called *Before the Dawn*, which preceded the performance of *The Late Mr. Costello*. Dressed as a coachman, I had to rush on the stage and apologize to a poor tramp for having run over him. But I had a good deal of worry on my mind that week, and couldn't get much *verve* into my performance.

After this it was some years before I went "behind the scenes" again. Then one night one of the dressers had failed to turn up, and I was engaged in that capacity. This was for *Florodora*, and I had the "chorus gentlemen" to look

after. Some of these were certainly not without some qualifications for the title of "gentlemen," but one of them was about the most completely shameless blackguard I ever struck.

The following week I was promoted to the charge of the "second principals" in the *Belle of New York*. These were a decent lot of boys. Then I was put on as principal dresser, with Henry Neville to attend to—one of the best I met during my three years at the theatre. I had the pleasure of dressing him on two visits, and if all actors were like him and Sidney Brough, and a few more, the "dresser's" lot would be an easy and a happy one.

Sometimes during these three years I "dressed," sometimes "supered," and now and then acted as "property man." I did not like the late hours, the stuffy dressing-rooms, or some of the actors, but the supplementary money I earned was welcome. I was more often than not in hot water with somebody—the "ladies'" dresser if I got more in tips than she did; and once I had a serious row with the manager of the refreshment bars. Part of our duties consisted in getting refreshment for the various performers, and any friends they had to visit them. A charge of threepence was made on each glass brought behind the scenes; this was returned

when it was taken back. Some of the hands casually employed got into the way of taking the glasses from the bars and then returning them as empties from the theatre and claiming the money. As this money was placed by itself, more glasses, of course, were returned than had been paid on, and we dressers were accused of having taken them. I had a scene with the manager and his wife, but, upon placing the facts of the case before Mr. Standen Triggs, the Managing Director of the Park, the refreshment manager, who had refused to serve me any longer, had to apologize and withdraw his taboo against me.

Finally, the female dresser, who wanted very badly to get some one else into my place, got me the sack, and herself at the same time.

It wasn't all hard work and trouble, however. With some companies—the D'Oyly Carte Opera (which included the genial Mr. Workman, who is doing so well at the Savoy) especially—it was a pleasure to be there. With Lewis Waller's company in *Monsieur Beaucaire* I had a pleasant—and lively—week. I have mentioned Sidney Brough (in *The Light that Failed*); I also dressed Mr. Sainsbury the playwright (*Sherlock Holmes*) and Louis Calvert, and Mr. Kendrick in the production by Fred Terry and Julia Neil-

son of *Sunday*. Louis was very ill, very irritable, but very generous.

As to the "supering," I was in several grand operas with a Moody-Manners Opera Company. In the first act of *Lohengrin* I had to stand on a rostrum at the back of the stage, dressed in a thick metalled tunic, holding a shield and spear, and I wasn't supposed to move for fifty minutes. All that time three or four large fleas were biting me in the small of my back. They were not there when I resumed the clothes and my stand on the rostrum for the fourth act.

My last visit to the theatre was to get H. B. Irving and Dorothea Baird's company to sign the petition for the release of Daisy Lord last autumn. Mr. and Mrs. Irving received me most kindly in their dressing-room, and signed my petition readily—as also did the rest of their company.

As to the morals *devant les scènes*—well, they are just the same as they are anywhere else—some and some. Some of the poorer musical comedy companies left much to be desired—probably because their personnel were poorly paid.

CHAPTER XX

OTHER LOVES

How many different lives have I lived during the past twenty years? The life of work, the religious life, the political, the erotic, the lives of pleasure and study. That makes half-a-dozen. And I have lived them all strenuously. Not to speak of my home life in which most of them centred.

My relations with women have been peculiar if not extensive. I am fond of fair women, yet I could never get but one fair woman to care for me, and I am ashamed to say I would not marry her because she had a child. Like my poor grandmother she had been victimized when very young. She was otherwise a virtuous girl. A plump, intelligent, happy-natured girl, fond of fun and virtuous. I do not know what has become of her. She deserved a happy life.

My first effort at Socialist organization fell through owing to most of the members of our Fabian Society leaving the town. I returned to the chair work. I had quite given up the chapel, and began to mix with very questionable

company. I had met with so many disappointments from them that I had grown tired of treating women always with consideration and respect. I made up my mind to be revenged on the sex *per se*.

One young bath chair-man whom I had previously abhorred for his loose life I now made my constant companion. I wanted to see "life." We did not drink much: a glass or two of ginger wine or ale during the evening was the extent of our excesses in that direction. But we scraped acquaintance with girls on the parades or in Terminus Road, and usually we had half-a-dozen or more going at the same time. If we found them agreeable we kept to them more or less, if not we let them go. But whatever "Weak Chest"—the nickname of my companion—intended, I was all the time secretly looking out for a girl whom I thought I could marry. He kept most of the complaisant ones to himself, though a few came my way; but I preferred those he could not seduce, because I hoped to find a mate amongst them.

I left his companionship for a time to go back to Louie, who had written to me, having discovered her postman lover's perfidy. I spent the summer of '94 courting her. I used to get up at three o'clock on the Sundays when it was

her morning out and walk the sixteen miles to Hastings so as to miss none of the time she had at liberty, because the first train from Eastbourne did not reach there before nearly midday. We had some good times together. I could earn good money those summers, so that I could afford days off. Sometimes when it was her afternoon out I earned five or six shillings before dinner! At last she agreed to marry me, and the banns were put up at Eastbourne and her home at Tunbridge Wells: then she changed her mind at the last minute. She returned me my ring—a chased gold one with "Mizpah" in highly burnished lettering on it which had cost me fifteen shillings. She has since married and had children, but I understand she has always been very delicate, so perhaps it was just as well I did lose her.

Her treachery upset me very much, and partly through that and partly through the dread of the winter I became very depressed. "Weak Chest" had always been in the habit of taking drugs of various sorts. Among these was crude opium, which he swallowed in small pellets. I got some—twopenny-worth, I think—and swallowed the lot, washing it down with a pint of Burton ale and hoping I should never wake again. Fortunately, or unfortunately, I did,

but I was confined to my bed for a week afterwards. When I got about again I resumed my nightly prowls with "Weak Chest."

I had two or three more disappointments. One was a little fair girl—a laundry-maid at the Grand—with whom I went out a few times, treating her to the theatre. I treated her with respect, but found afterwards that she deserved none. Another, a tiny dot of a nurse girl from Cornwall proved to be "no better than she should be." And she looked *so* innocent! We met with all sorts, big and little, chaste and unchaste, moral and very much immoral.

"Weak Chest" had a companion called "Escollopes," a dark, half-balmy, but wholly cunning yokel. I could not endure this man. Even as it was if I could have found a really nice girl to care for me I should have broken away from their company a long while before I did.

Then there was another girl who pretended to be strictly virtuous, but whom we discovered was not. A fair girl with thick protruding lips, whom I might have married if my wife had served me the same as Louie had done. I was keeping company with both of them at the same time. I didn't mean to be sold a second time. She wrote to me a day or two after I was married and my wife opened the letter.

Then there were two sisters, one married, one single: the married one was not a prude, the single one was.

I met my wife through the introduction of a friend. She was a *petite* dark girl, a native of Windsor. I was tired of the fast life I was leading. So we married. I have never been sorry. She has been a good and faithful wife. I have been a bad, but faithful, husband. She is usually cheerful as a cricket. Considering what we have gone through and the natural shortcomings of her husband she keeps her happiness remarkably well. She is fond of singing, and used to be fond of dancing. A clever girl, she was formerly a leader in the Band of Hope movement in her native town. Her father's mother was a Bunyan, a direct descendant of the author of the *Pilgrim's Progress*. I regard her, as I have every reason to, with the deepest affection and respect, though she doesn't always think I do. I shall have more to say of her presently. We were married on November 23, 1895. I was then twenty-seven.

CHAPTER XXI

FIELD LANE

I HAVE made several journeys to London in search of that most elusive of earthly blessings for the worker—constant employment. One such brought me into contact with the C.O.S. and with another institution where the treatment of the unfortunate unemployed contrasts very favourably with what is accorded them by that body.

When I landed in town I had the better part of a sovereign—if not more—in my pocket. My first care was to provide myself with lodgings for at least a week, and benefiting by earlier experiences I did it by paying for them in advance at one of those "Pearce and Plenty" temperance hotels—very useful places for those who can afford them. I didn't know of the existence of the "Rowton Houses" till later, else for the same money I could have procured shelter for a fortnight.

I spent this week in going from place to place answering advertisements—principally from the *Daily Chronicle*, but without getting a berth. I

had references and decent clothes. Then, my time being up, and my money all gone, I spent a night or two on the Albert Embankment, where I met an unemployed brass-fitter who advised me to apply to the C.O.S. and the Field Lane Homes.

This I did the next day. I was kept waiting some time at the C.O.S. office near Shaftesbury Avenue. Then I was interviewed by a supercilious young man and woman, who advised me to return to Eastbourne. However, I told them how bad things had been there, and they sent me with a note to a certain Refuge in the neighbourhood of Hoxton. Here the manager, or whatever he was, refused to take me in, but gave me a ticket for a penny basin of soup. I told them I was homeless, but that is all they did for me. At the same time they wrote to friends of mine in Eastbourne, whose names I had given them as references, for subscriptions, pretending that they had "helped" me!

So I went on to Field Lane. This constitutes a piece of old London situated between Rosebery Avenue and Saffron Hill. You turn down Vine Street—out of the Clerkenwell Road—which contains the Holborn Workhouse, and you find what is left of Field Lane at the bottom. Rosebery Avenue, which you may reach by a

flight of steps, has cut the rest off. In a corner formed by the junction of Vine Street and Field Lane there is a large block of buildings which contains the Working Men and Women's Refuges, a *crèche*, a large hall used for religious meetings and the offices of the Field Lane Mission—an institution founded a great many years ago, partly through the efforts of the Baroness Burdett Coutts and Charles Dickens. Connected with it was formerly the noted "Field Lane Ragged School," but that has ceased to exist.

I applied here for shelter and was admitted at once. To be taken in, if there are any vacancies, a man must have two qualifications: he must be decently dressed and have references, and he is given food and shelter for a month unless he obtains employment before. I cannot speak too highly of this institution or of its secretary, Mr. Pratt (I think that was his name), who was most kind and considerate to all the inmates. Of course one did not get, or expect, the luxuries or comforts one would expect at a hotel, but there were good warm beds and plenty of food —some consideration to one who had been watching for daylight on the embankments for a night or two, with an empty stomach and no prospect of breakfast.

Having been admitted and enjoyed a good warm bath, I was given a large cup of cocoa, a plate of cold meat and some bread. The beds are arranged in two dormitories, one above the other, the lower one being used in the daytime as a refectory, the beds being folded back neatly against the walls. In the morning all the inmates assist in cleaning and dusting various parts of the building. Then there is breakfast, a large mug of cocoa with a pound of bread, after that a short service in a large room (conducted by the secretary), and the men are allowed to go where they choose in search of employment until five p.m. There is a good dinner at noon for those who care to return for it. At tea time a pint of good tea and another pound of bread. The inmates supplement their bread with meat saved from dinner—which is plentiful—or, if they can afford it, with butter or margarine they buy themselves. I believe I am right in adding that when there is any left the cook distributes cold meat at breakfast and tea. Except that they are not supposed to enter a public-house when they are out, or to use bad language on the premises, the inmates are not interfered with. They are allowed to smoke in the yards, if they can procure the means, and if they can see their way to earning a few shillings, or have

appointments with respect to employment out of their hours of liberty, they are allowed to go out, being "let off" their duties in the institution.

Sunday is the busiest day. At the top of the building and covering the whole of it is a very large mission hall. Here the Sunday services are held. To them in the morning come such a crowd of tatterdemalion men and women as one can only see at such a function in a great city; for after the religious service another follows, which is the cause of these poor wretches' attendance: each is given a pint of steaming hot cocoa and a pound of bread. These are not the ordinary inmates, but the wreckage of society from anywhere, everywhere, hundreds of them wolfing their food as though they have had none before for days.

The ordinary inmates assist to distribute this, and afterwards clean the whole place out, floors, forms and everything, ready for the Sunday school which assembles there in the afternoon. After dinner, which is always accompanied on Sundays by a large slab of bread-pudding, some are allowed out and others told off to assist in the Sunday school by acting as doorkeepers and distributors of hymn-books. Sometimes entertainments are given during the week to which

they are admitted and where some very good singing is provided.

I stayed there four weeks, but could get no employment, except three or four days addressing envelopes at an office in the City Road, kept by an advertising agent. At this place they advertised for a few sandwich-men and men to distribute circulars at eighteen-pence per day. Before seven o'clock in the morning the street in front of the office was crowded with hundreds of men waiting for the chance of a job even at that price! And people say the unemployed are idle because they won't work!

There was every convenience at Field Lane for us to keep ourselves and our clothing clean. When I had nowhere to go after a job I spent a good deal of time in the South Kensington Museum or in the free libraries in the neighbourhood of Holborn Town Hall. On my way back in the evening I often saw crowds of "casuals," men and women, huddled round the entrance to the Holborn Workhouse—such rags and awful misery!

After my month was up I had a night or two in the Rowton House, King's Cross Road—the working man's palace. Then I thought I would go to Brighton, and it took me nearly two days to walk there. I slept the intervening night in

a cart in an open wayside shed not far from Horley. The next day I returned to Eastbourne in despair.

I do not know if the Field Lane institution is still in existence, or, if it is, whether or not it is conducted on the same lines. I trust, for the sake of at least a few of the poor devils who find themselves workless and homeless in London, that it is. When I was there it sheltered men of all sorts—clerks, mechanics, sailors, tradesmen, all, so far as I could see, deserving cases of men who only wanted a lift to get on their legs again. But even in those days—this must have been a great many years ago—the question of the unemployed was an acutely pressing one, though they had not become so articulate as they have recently. "Society must find a solution to the unemployed problem, or the unemployed may bring about the solution of society."

In the meantime the Field Lane Missions have done something which is more than some more pretentious agencies have.

CHAPTER XXII

GOING TO THE DEVIL

When I started in life I was well stocked with ethical ideals of a high order. I have been stripped and left like the man in the *Message from Mars*, a "beggar and in rags" so far as my own righteousness has been concerned. The irony of fate is most curious. I was fond of fair women, they would have none of me. Dark women haunted me. When I was young I disliked beer and despised the drunkard. Sometimes now I drink a great deal of beer, though as I grow older I am getting to dislike it again. Then if I didn't think every woman a saint till I was thirty, I did till I was twenty-four—this in spite of my early environment, where loose talk was common. Then I turned and despised and abused them. However, during those bohemian years I never wilfully led an innocent girl astray, and if I had got any one of them into trouble I should have married her. I have always longed to be able to earn enough to be able to pay my way honestly. I hardly ever have.

"Owe no man anything, except to love one another" is an injunction I would gladly obey—if I could. Yet my nature is so complex that "Take no thought for the morrow" is an order I obey readily. Indeed, I find I have to. If I plan and take care everything goes wrong. When I have a number of orders booked it is bound to rain. Once I had orders to the amount of eight-and-six for the following day, and I needed the money badly. It poured in torrents, and I only managed to get eighteen-pence of it. If I make up my mind to do a thing it is hardly ever done. If I determine not to do anything it usually happens. I did not mean to write this story, or, writing it, meant to suppress a great many things. But fate, in the form of Mr. H. G. Wells, has proved too much for me.

I have spoken of "Escollopes," who at the time I first met him lived with a loose woman. He, too, was always about with other women. At last his paramour left him, and he married a young girl who, like himself, was half balmy. It was discovered that he had a wife living, and he was sentenced to nine months' hard labour for bigamy. He was a bath chair-man, and used to send the poor girl he had married out on the streets. He was so utterly lost to all sense of

decency that he bragged of what she earned there.

A third beauty was a married man having several children. He had failed in business as a baker near London. If he could possibly be worse than the other two, he was. He is dead.

About this time an old man, the very image of Sir John Falstaff, came to our town. He had money, and bought several chairs, which he let out. After I was married and had given up the company of these men, "Weak Chest" and "Escollopes" went to lodge with this old man and drew chairs for him. This was after Escollopes' release from prison. They had the amazing impudence to advertise for housekeepers in the *West Sussex Gazette*, although they had only one room between them. Several girls replied. At last one, the daughter of a warder in the county gaol at Lewes, came to investigate. Information was given to the police, they were ordered out of the town, and their licences were cancelled. They have spent most of their time since tramping in the summer and "resting" in the workhouse during the winter. The last time I saw "Weak Chest" he was suffering from some sort of mental decay. He cherished the most absurd hallucinations

about people and things — especially horse-racing, to which, with women, he always gave most of his attention.[1]

It was through this man I got to know most of the girls I did during my three or four years or so of "fast" life. We seldom associated with the mercenary Venus. I always despised her and always shall, because I believe the sentimental nonsense talked about her *is* mere nonsense. Few women are really driven to the streets by economic reasons. A clean-natured girl, if she gives way to her instincts, will not sell her body for money; she would rather "work her fingers to the bone," or, if she can get no work, go to the "house." Only calculating evil-minded women take to the streets. There may be exceptions, of course; that is the rule. I knew one fairly decent woman who was driven out by a lazy, brutal husband. But a poor girl I used to know, a dainty, refined, religious girl, did the wise thing. A soldier whom she had unfortunately met and married wanted to send her out on the streets in Dublin. She went either to the police or a clergyman, and her fare was paid home. She died shortly afterwards of consumption. That, when a woman has fallen

[1] Since writing the above I hear this man has been sent to a lunatic asylum. If such be the case, he makes the eighth Eastbourne chair-man who has lost his reason in my time.

and her shame is open so that she is despised by every one, she should retort by becoming heartless and utterly evil is natural. My contention is that the average prostitute sins from deliberate choice and as a thief robs—for gain. I know she cannot help herself. It is her nature, but her nature is evil. She is own sister to the woman who makes a mercenary marriage.

Though when I was young I disliked drink of any kind, somewhere, somehow, I acquired a taste for it.

When I first began as a bath chair-man I used to patronize a coffee-stall near the Wish Tower, but I found in time that the food and drink supplied there was unsatisfactory and too expensive, consisting as it did of cheap cakes and pastry. Whereas it cost me fourpence or fivepence for a mid-day meal there, and then I was not satisfied, I could go to the Devonshire Park bar and get a fairly good meal of stout and bread-and-cheese for twopence-halfpenny. Unfortunately, the cheese often proved thirst-provoking. Some years ago one could get good tea and coffee at the Park, but so far as the outside bars are concerned their sale has been discontinued.

Before I was married I drank occasionally,

but not systematically. Afterwards the habit grew on me till I got so low that I was fast becoming a confirmed inebriate. I would do almost anything to get drink. I have given up drinking spirits and spending my nights at the public-house, possibly I shall some day give up drinking beer. I take it sometimes as a brain-stimulant, at others to get rest. When I was young a great many people, including Ruth and her mother, used to try to persuade me to take stout on account of my health, but I refused to take it regularly. I did not like it, and only one glass would make me feel tired.

It has made me do and say a great many foolish and wicked things. It has lost me some friends; it has made a great deal of the unhappiness of my home life. It has aggravated my poverty. Yet——

One stands for days worrying with insufficient food, then a shilling or two comes along. And if they sold good food and tea and coffee in public-houses, as well as thirst-producing food and beer, one could eat more and have a cup of tea. Then some of the houses in which we have lived have been so overrun with fleas and other pests that sleep was impossible without a deep drink. I have only met two or three really

decent men as publicans. I do not wish to make myself out as being any better or any worse than I really am. But honestly I often wish I could become a teetotaller. Not out of any prudish consideration, but because I am sure it would be better for me and mine. Some days I drink very little. I have no desire for it. Often I have started the day with the fixed determination not to have any drink at all, but something or some fool has come along and upset me, and I have ended by drinking a great deal. Times of public excitement, too, are dangerous to me. I am extremely sensitive to telepathic influences both from a distance and from my immediate environment. When there is a great deal of drinking going on, such as at holiday times, or as when the South African War was on, I find myself strongly seized by the craving. Perhaps before this is published I shall have broken away from the habit altogether, though, as I say, it is useless for me to determine to do anything, because it is seldom or never done if I do.

But since my illness last autumn, which my doctor told me was partly caused by the impure beers I had been drinking, I find I cannot stand so much as I used to. I suppose, in view of

Mr. Lloyd George's Budget, the brewers are using even more chemicals than usual.

When I was young I used to take considerable pride in my appearance. I earned more money and could get better clothes. I always wore cuffs as well as a collar and tie—in the evening and on Sundays, kid gloves.

But the years have sweated all that out of me. Not only is it difficult, sometimes well-nigh impossible, for one to keep oneself in decent boots and clothing at our uncertain work, but when we do get a few decent things the demands of landlord or chair-owner make their consignment to the pawnshop inevitable. Many a time we have stripped the clothes off our backs and put away our bed for rent.

So one gets low and shabby and disheartened. In a snobbish town like Eastbourne dress means so much. With little chance of a healthy night's sleep owing to the insect pests, little decent food, many unoccupied hours, much worry and often many disappointments during the day, it is no wonder one is driven to the abuse of alcohol.

Of course, it is foolish and degrading, and, like all unhealthy practices, it breeds its own punishment: nature takes care of that. But these unhealthy and unnatural habits are bred

in us because we live in an unhealthy and unnatural society. On the other hand, nearly all the great fighting nations have been hard-drinking nations: we are engaged in one of the hardest, if not the hardest, campaigns of all time and this war will not be to the battalions of plaster saints.

CHAPTER XXIII

HOME AND MARRIED LIFE

I DESCRIBED Kate as a "*petite* dark girl." She was a winsome little girl, bright, affectionate and vivacious. Our life has been a trying one; but she is just a girl still, though she has borne me two children and is nearly forty.

I had only a few decent lodgings before I was married. When I got any really comfortable ones I usually had to leave them for some reason or other, from no fault of mine. It has been the same with our homes since.

The last lodgings I had when I was single were the most comfortable. They were clean and central, and I did precisely as I liked. I had a small bed-sitting room on the ground-floor, where I could have any friend I chose to see me. Here we lived for some time after we were married. We had a lot of young friends who used to visit us. Then we furnished rooms in a house where Kate worked as an ironer, and her mother came to live with us. She was a sharp, active old lady, a regular attendant at a mission-hall on Sundays. She soon obtained employment, and

between us, for a few years, we managed fairly well. Then my boy was born on Queen Victoria's birthday, 1898. We had been married about three years.

The description of the baby in the *Blue Lagoon* reminded me forcibly of him. He was very ugly—at first. The doctor had some trouble to get him to cry. Then when he was held up for us to see him he looked round from side to side with queer curiosity. After a week or two he became very beautiful; he had bright golden hair and deep blue eyes. But he was weakly, and he had to have artificial food. He was subject to convulsions. I sat up with him for nearly a fortnight with a bath of hot water with, I believe, mustard and vinegar in it, to put him in on a fit appearing. The doctor pulled him through for a time, however. Then we had to have another medical man, because our own left the town, and the child grew worse, dying in his grandmother's arms on September 1.

My daughter was born on February 2, 1901, during a snowstorm. Her mother was able to nurse her, and though she is slight she is thriving, a very sharp, cheerful child. She takes after her mother.

I have nursed my wife through two illnesses. The last was the worst. She came home one day

complaining of pains in her side. I got her to bed and fetched a doctor. He said she was suffering from pneumonia. For the next fortnight I watched her night and day. She gradually grew thinner and thinner, till nothing was left of her but skin and bones. Then she was taken to the hospital for her lung to be drained. Here she lay a month, coming out convalescent, and by the kindness of some friends was sent to a convalescent home away at Folkestone, and when she came back she looked ten years younger.

Milly, my little girl, was just over three months old when her grandmother met with an accident from the effects of which she died. She had always been a great help to us, and we missed her sadly. About this time we had an Aberdeen terrier, the one the Hon. W. B. Hanbury gave me. He was very fond of the old lady, principally, I suspect, because she brought him food from the hotel where she worked. He used to go up the road to meet her regularly every night at 7.30—her time for coming home. When he met her he would dance round her, yelping, in his funny way, with delight, so that we always knew when she was coming. After the accident he asked to be let out at 7.15 every night till we moved to another house. Here his favourite resting-place was on the staircase, where an old

dress of hers was hanging. It was the one she was wearing at the time of her accident, and had blood stains on it which we could not, or did not, remove.

I never see a quaint Aberdeen, with its funny waddle and curious black face, without thinking of poor "Whiskey"; he was my constant companion for many years. I had other dogs. There was "Becky," a retriever puppy I was very fond of. She was an unreliable little rip with a will of her own, and we had to part. Then I had a half-breed retriever who would fetch and carry anything pretty well. Whiskey and Becky were both afraid of the water; this dog—I called him "Dooley" and his brother "Peter Jackson," they both came to a bad end—followed me into the water and tried to drag me out when I went bathing. If I live to own another dog I'll try to get another Aberdeen. They have their faults, but they are at least faithful and affectionate. They are very intelligent and sensitive. All good dogs are sensitive. Whiskey used to cry at a cross word, as also did Horace Stretton's brown spaniel. Dogs, cats, horses—every teachable animal can be understood and will understand if we have patience and kindliness enough with them. I and Whiskey were more like comrades who quite understood each other than

master and dog. Indeed, there was no question of mastery after the first few weeks of teaching, it was purely one of friendship.

I am extremely fond of animals and most living things—trees and flowers, insects (except fleas!), birds and cats. There is an old Tom in our street with whom I have been on speaking terms for some time. I used to quarrel years ago with a caged thrush. He was a wicked bird who could sing *and* peck. We tried once to keep a tame linnet ourselves, but a neighbour's child frightened it to death, and we have never tried another. The sparrows who frequent the corners where we stand with our chairs come and ask us for food when they see us eating. Now and then one will eat out of our hands.

Kate did not return to work, except for an occasional week, for three years after Milly was born. It was a hard struggle to live with the chair. Now and then I was helped by a week's work at the theatre or I do not know how we should have got through at all. Milly grew a bright, refined little thing under her mother's care. Since she has been to school, however, she has become somewhat wild. Naturally, as the only child, she is petted at home, but we have found great difficulty in getting her cared for while we were at work, as she should be. One

woman was cruel to her and half-starved her. That led to the whooping-cough, from which she was saved by a good doctor and emulsion of cod liver oil. Kate had just returned to work. We moved to a house where the landlady took care of her. We paid our rent regularly, and for her, and left food for her. I doubt if she had much of the food, the woman's husband was almost always out of work. He was a great drunken lout who was always beating his wife: one of the men who "don't care." Although he did me all the harm he possibly could, I saved him from being "sold up" afterwards by telling a broker's man that he hadn't anything worth taking—which wasn't the truth. The high rents for small houses in Eastbourne make it impossible for one to have a home to oneself. Either you must let rooms or take rooms, and you have to chance your luck as to what kind of people you get with. A few of the people we have lodged with have been passable, but we have never had the luck to catch a decent lodger when we have had a house ourselves.

One winter, when Milly was very young, we had a large room at three shillings per week with some decent, quiet people. They had a daughter at home, a pretty little brown-haired girl of eighteen or so, who used to be good

company. She liked to have all the doors open when her parents were out, so that she could hear my sometimes equivocal jokes. She was a good girl, just taking a furtive peep at the joy of life. In the spring, to my great regret, we had to leave to enable her parents to let the room furnished. We had to take an old cottage in the very worst slum in Eastbourne, because in the spring unfurnished rooms are hard to come by. Here we found the environment absolutely too degraded, and we took two unfurnished rooms with the people I have mentioned above.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE LOWEST DEPTH

Oliver Wendell Holmes says somewhere that every man has three personalities, two more or less fictitious and one real: What he appears to others, what he thinks of himself, and what he really is. Furneaux Jordan, in his valuable treatise on *Physiology and Character*, divides the human temperament broadly into two classes—the critical and the emotional—which are linked by any number of gradations. Whatever truth there may be in either of these postulates, I personally consider that most characters are many sided, and that they possess some aspects which are developed only under exceptional circumstances. Men change considerably with changing conditions. Not all, but most, appear to be all right till they get into the fire of temptation or adversity. Then their equanimity or their probity shrivels up like burnt straw. The Mark Tapleys are few in real life, though now and then one meets a specimen. The censorious who wouldn't do this, that, or the other, and who brag that they have

weathered temptation are many; but when one gets to know the truth about them one finds that there has been some counter-balancing circumstance or other which has prevented them from falling.

I knew a man who had been in constant employment practically all his working life. He helped others less fortunate than himself on occasion, though, like all such people, he imagined that if others were not so fortunate as he was it was their own fault. He was himself unexpectedly thrown out of work, and remained out for some time. Having a large family it soon became a really distressing case. I called the attention of a wealthy gentleman I knew—the late Mr. Melia, a retired tea merchant—to it, and he promptly helped with a sovereign. This got to the ears of another man I knew, who had been out of work but was in employment again. He was quite contemptuous. "I don't believe in charity," he said, and I found out afterwards that his wife not only had a considerable sum of money by her, but that she worked and kept him when he was doing nothing.

It is certainly a great mistake, as a rule, to take people upon their own estimate—even when they are not wilfully lying.

These remarks have been induced by a retrospective mood which I have been in this morning: a mood which is quite naturally induced by this work, and I have been trying to weigh my own character, a very difficult job, because it appears of a mercurial nature, and my scales are defective. That I might have been different and acted differently I have no doubt—had I possessed different qualities. It is easy to be wise after the event. I am, unfortunately for one thing, of the same stock as poor "Tess's" family, the "Come day, go day, God send Sunday" people. Very foolish of me, I know, and very unfortunate for me; if I could reshape my disposition so as to ally myself with some more prudent and more fortunate tribe I should be thankful.

And sometimes God sends a very bad Sunday.

One year—it was when Milly was about three years old—I had had a very bad spring. Two or three chairs had been taken away from me because I could not pay the rent regularly: one I had hired through the worst of the winter and was only five shillings in arrears. Then a man named Smith, who has the best chairs in the town, but who, being a Conservative, is down on me as an "agitator," let me have one

of his. After a wet week doing nothing, quite by chance I picked up a good job for a fortnight. This enabled me to get some much needed clothing and medicine and nourishment for Milly, who was recovering from whooping-cough.

At that time we were lodging with the drunken lout I have mentioned in another place. We had paid our rent regularly and helped them all we could, as he was out of work most of the time; but in a drunken fit he had given us notice, and we had taken other lodgings. The party I had been taking out had gone away, and it being at the end of June—a very dull time—I did the moving myself, as I had no work to go to.

On the Monday I had a feeling of horrible depression. I am subject to these fits, and they invariably portend some evil. On the Tuesday I did the moving, and was horrified to find all our bedding infested with house bugs, so I had to take it to the destructor, and we slept that night on the floor. The next morning I took Milly to a friend of ours in Leslie Street, as the landlady at the new address refused to look after her on account of her cough. It was unusual for me to take her out so early in the morning. She was delighted, and danced along by my side

singing the chorus of "The Holy City," which she had learned through hearing me sing that song. We met the friend I was taking her to —an old workmate of my wife's—and she took charge of her. I went out with my chair, but got nothing. Just before twelve o'clock another chair-man told me that a county court bailiff had been looking for me for a day or two with a warrant for my arrest.

I knew there was a judgment against me on the suit of a firm of "tallymen." This firm has branches all over the country, and is reputed to have more cases in the various county courts than any other establishment. Their one preoccupation in politics is the fear lest imprisonment for "contempt of court" (as it is called) should be by law abolished.

Knowing I was two months in arrears in my payments into court, I put my chair away and went towards home with the intention of selling some furniture; but on the way I met the bailiff, who arrested me. I told him what I intended doing, but he said the warrant had been issued not only for the two instalments overdue, but for the full amount of the debt.

The laws relating to debtor and creditor in England form one of the most glaring instances of class legislation. Those who are compara-

tively well-to-do or who can command large sums and large credits may contract any amount of debt, which if they have enough ready money to pay the preliminary fees involved in becoming bankrupt they can shuffle off without any great personal inconvenience. I have met numbers of men who have "broke," some of them for thousands. They didn't seem much the worse for it, many of them, and in many instances started in business again and became as big as ever. To say nothing of the notorious bankrupts of the Hooley and "Jubilee Plunger" classes. But if a poor man gets into debt he must pay or go to prison.

Again. If a man owes less than fifty pounds he cannot become bankrupt. He may obtain an administration order, under which he will have to pay twenty-five per cent. or fifty per cent. or the whole of what he owes by monthly instalments; if he fails to do so he is liable to be imprisoned for twenty-eight or forty days. If he owes more than fifty pounds and can raise enough money to pay the necessary fees he can become a bankrupt, perhaps pay nothing, and, unless he is fraudulent, is not sent to gaol—

> "One law for the rich, another for the poor—
> O, what a happy land is England!"

The bailiff took me to the Gildredge, where he

treated me to a drink or two. He paid for drinks for me there and more at Lewes. I was very glad of them. Besides having a thirst induced by eating salt fish for breakfast, my position made alcohol acceptable. These he paid for out of my "conduct money." Had I chosen I could have demanded a cab at Lewes station. I preferred the beer. He also gave me a letter-card, which I posted to my wife telling her what had happened and where Milly was. This did not reach her until the following day, and she passed a terrible night of anxiety.

Arrived at Lewes we went up that *via dolorosa* School Hill, calling at a fried fish shop and the White Hart for refreshments. Arrived at the prison—which I had passed many times before, devoutly hoping I might never see the inside of it—I was handed over to the receiving warder.

A shiver ran through me as the outer gate was shut and locked behind me. The bailiff conducted me across a paved court up some steps to a large glazed door. This was unlocked by a warder standing inside, who relocked it after our admission. We entered a large corridor with doors opening on either side of it, through one of which we passed into the receiving office, where I was handed over to the prison authorities as represented by another warder.

There were about half-a-dozen wretched-looking men sitting in this place on forms against the walls. I gathered that they had all been committed from Brighton for petty offences. One of them was a very old man of the tramp variety, who had a large flag basket on a string.

We were told to take off our boots, and were weighed and measured. Then we were taken through corridors and down various flights of stairs to another warder, who was seated at a table in a dark passage. One by one we had to pass into the bath-room, where we had to strip and, I think, put our clothes outside. I was not allowed to keep my own clothes, which was rather annoying, as I had carefully concealed most of the tobacco I had about them, all except a small piece, which I put in my mouth.

I don't know whether water was scarce at Lewes that year, or whether they were afraid we should commit suicide by drowning ourselves in it if they gave us enough; but I had only about six inches of it, and that very dirty, in which to bathe. When I got outside the warder, who was urbane, not to say genial, told me to spit the tobacco out of my mouth. I was then shut into a large tile-paved cell opposite the bath-room, where after a time a bundle was

thrown in to me. This contained a blue jacket and a pair of trousers, an old "glengarry" cap, a coarse shirt, two low shoes (odd ones), with broken pieces of lace in them, a wooden spoon and a towel—all marked with a broad arrow. After a time they brought my supper, skilly and coarse brown bread. After a restless night, feeling horribly miserable, then breakfast, the same as supper. After that the doctor—a genial official who joked. "Anything the matter with you?" he asked. "No," I said. "What's the matter with your eyes?" he asked. "They've always been like that," I replied. Doctors always want to look at my eyes, and I know it's no use. "Anything else?" he asked. "Only being in here," I said. "Oh!" he answered, "you'll soon get over that."

Then I was taken up to the governor's office. This is situated in the central block of the prison. Outside it corridors lit by skylights and occasional windows at the side with long rows of doors in between seemed to branch off in every direction, intersected and crossed and recrossed by iron stairways, bridges and balconies. Stone and iron or steel in every direction. I had to cross complicated bridges and ascend and descend various stairways. I was left at a door opening on the central hall, where the governor's

office is situated, by the warder who had conducted me there. Being a stranger to the place and after the dark cell and passages dazzled with the light, I did not know which way to go. A group of warders stood on the floor below. "Come on! this way!" one of them shouted in a brutal voice. Of course I took the wrong turning. "Now then, where are you going to?" he shouted again. "We'll soon make you look lively now we've got you here."

I got to the floor at last, and was ordered to put my bundle (containing towel, etc.) on the floor and stand with my face to the wall. There were others, and we had to stand about two feet apart from each other. After waiting what seemed to me to be an inordinately long time I was taken before the governor, a little short man in a cycling suit, who sat behind a large writing-table. He read the committal order to me.

Then the chief warder, a big pompous man, questioned me as to my name and so on. When he came to "What religion?" I replied, "Agnostic," as I had the night before to the warder in the dark passage down below.

"*What?*" puffed the chief warder.

"Agnostic," I replied.

"'E dunno what 'e means, sir," he remarked

to the governor. I don't know what the latter entered in the prison register as my religion. After my examination by the governor some one behind me asked me if I could read. I found afterwards that he was the librarian.

To my disgust I was placed in charge of the brute who shouted at me when I could not see my way. Nearly all the warders were pigs, but this was the worst of the lot. We were all glad when at the end of the week he went on night duty, and we had a little better kind of a swine during the day.

He conducted me down one of the corridors and across a yard to one of the outer wings of the prison, which has from time immemorial been devoted to debtors and people committed for non-payment in civil cases—such as passive resisters. I was given a yellow badge marked

, 12 being the number of my cell in the D section—which I had to fasten on a button on my jacket. I was locked into a smaller, narrower cell paved like the other with tiles. This contained, to the left of the grated and frosted window, a wooden plank bed, to the right a cocoa-nut fibre mattress and pillow with blankets, sheets and counterpane standing under

a small shelf upon which were devotional books and a slate and pencil. Between these and the door were various tin utensils, which had to be placed in a certain precise order against the wall: a small wooden stool and, just inside the door, a small table over which was a small gas bracket and a bell-pull, neither of which I had occasion to use.

After dinner I was given cocoa-nut fibre to pick. This was my usual occupation, and in spite of the warder's sneers and threats I picked as little as possible. I argued that I had been sent to this institution, which was maintained mainly in the interest of the exploiting class, by one of its members, and I would see them farther before I would do more than I was obliged to.

On week days we had to be up at six, empty our slops, brush out our cells, burnish our tinware with soap and brick-dust till they looked like silver, roll up our bedding—the sheets, blankets, etc., had to be folded just so in one precise way. At seven we had breakfast—a pint of tea and a lump of brown bread, then exercise in one of the yards. Here we were allowed to converse. I found another man from Eastbourne there under an administration order, a grandson of the old John Vine I used to meet at the Liberal Club. A laundryman was there for non-pay-

ment under an affiliation order from Hastings, several from the same place for rate default. There was also a well-dressed man from Brighton, whose friends "bought him out" before the expiration of his term; he was the only one of us who had retained his private clothes. We exercised twice a day, a welcome break to the monotony of solitary confinement. The yards in which we walked and chatted contained flower borders full of roses in bloom.

After exercise came chapel. We sat in two rows quite at the back, with one or two "second division" prisoners near us. They were dressed in chocolate-coloured uniforms, the ordinary prisoners in khaki. There were some who wore knickers instead of trousers, who I understood to be long term convicts. I saw one white-headed man, who reminded me of "Navvy," the old chair-man, and I pitied him very much. The ordinary prisoners filed into chapel in batches from different doors to ours, and I could not help remarking how ghastly white many of their faces were. I did not see any women; there was a gallery over our heads where I supposed them to be. Along each wall, at the end of each third or fourth row, was a kind of rostrum in which the warders sat so that they could overlook the prisoners.

I had not attended church or chapel for a good many years, and I looked upon these services with contempt, considering them a bitter mockery both of the alleged God in whose honour they were supposed to be held and the people who were compelled to attend them. In my mind I jeered at and despised the class which had instituted them and the creature they paid to conduct them. He came in and went out locking and unlocking the door after him like any other warder; for I considered him as being nothing but a superior sort of warder who paraded in a white surplice instead of a blue uniform.

After chapel we were marched back to our section and locked into our cells till dinner time, the morning being broken by the governor's inspection. This function also aroused my secret derision. A warder came first, unlocking and opening the cell doors. Then the governor marched by, a little man in a dark-grey knicker-bocker suit, between the pompous chief and another warder, all three employing the goose step and presenting a spectacle that would bring the house down if it was repeated on the stage. While they passed we had to stand at attention at the back of our cells.

Then came dinner—at twelve. There was

always the brown bread and half washed potatoes in their skins. The other constituents were varied, consisting either of suet pudding, a piece of boiled meat, "bully beef," or a very small piece of bacon—all fat—with haricot beans. In the afternoon exercise again, and work till tea time, when we had a pint of cocoa and more brown bread. A warder visited us at about seven, and told us to put our work outside, after which we were free to go to bed.

Twice a week the librarian, accompanied by a prisoner, changed our books. Prisoners, accompanied by a warder, brought us our meals. Most of them had grown semi-circular beards. I was beginning to show signs of one myself when I was released. These men would say a word or two: "Cheer up!" "It won't be long!" or some similar phrase, if they could do so without attracting attention.

On Sundays we had longer services, more exercise and no work. The Catholics and Protestants held separate services in the same chapel. Sometimes at the former we could hear some very fine singing.

Some of the other debtors had work to do for which they were paid. White-washing, mail-bag making and so on, and once or twice we were marched up to clean and dust the chapel.

This made a change, and the warder in charge of us there chatted affably, told us stories and did not drive us.

I found the confinement, the monotony and the want of tobacco the hardest to bear. At first I counted the days, then the hours, to the date of my release. I was allowed to write one letter, which I sent to a friend of mine in Eastbourne, asking him to see if he could raise a collection amongst the chair-men and others to help my wife during my imprisonment, giving him a message to Smith the chair-owner.

I received his reply the morning of my release. He told me he had collected only one shilling, and that the chair-owner said I couldn't have the chair again. Directly a man becomes an exploiter, even if it is in only a little tin-pot way, he ranges himself on the side of the predatory class.

It was good to get out into the fresh morning air—and to have a smoke. There were several prisoners released at the same time. One of them, who had done a month as a "drunk and disorderly," wanted a clay pipe and some matches. I had no light, so he took me into a public-house, where he treated me to some beer and tobacco. Good luck to him! I hadn't a penny. If ever I go again—and one never

knows one's luck—I shall insist on having either the cab or some of the "conduct money" to spend when I come out. The agent of the Discharged Prisoners Aid Society met us at the station, but he would pay my fare only as far as Polegate.

When I got out at Polegate I had about four miles to walk into Eastbourne—wondering what was going to happen next. I remember thinking that everything was "on the knees of the gods."

I found that the man at the house where we had taken rooms had threatened to turn my wife out when she came home from work the day I was put away. He had no excuse and no legal right for doing so, but she got a friend to let her have a furnished room. She found out where Milly was after some trouble. When I reached the house where she was staying—it was on a Tuesday and she had not gone to work—Milly came running to me, crying out, "Oh, daddy! my daddy!" the tears running down her face. We have always been great friends, I and Milly, though we fall out sometimes, as most friends do. Kate had sold most of the furniture while I was away. The people who took her in made her pay pretty dearly for her accommodation.

We lodged with them for some time. The house was horribly verminous. The people earned good money, but never had anything for their use. They had "commandeered" all our odds and ends of jugs and basins, saucepans and crockery, and everything else they could lay their hands on. I failed to get another chair for some weeks, and had a pretty rough time of it, though, as it was a very slack season, I did not lose much. Early in August I got a shabby old three-wheeler with which I had little success, but I managed to keep it on for nine or ten months. The man to whom Smith let the chair I had before I was arrested had it about a month, paying no rent.

There was one advantage in being in prison. There was no rent collector to worry one on Mondays. And then I had more substantial and more regular meals than I usually did at home. Eating, sleeping and reading helped to pass the time and break the monotony.

CHAPTER XXV

SOME MORE OF OUR HOMES AND A FEW OF OUR LODGERS

THE first lot of furniture we got together we kept for about four years. Then I voluntarily surrendered the greater part of it to a landlord to whom I owed some rent. It was not sold for a long while afterwards, and no account was ever rendered to me of what it fetched. I heard, casually, that it realized far more than I owed. It was made up mainly of things bought on the hire purchase system. An extremely slack time following upon the declaration of war in South Africa induced me to let it go. I had earned nothing for twelve days. The chair-owner I was drawing for at the time was pressing me, and though my wife and her mother were working, their combined earnings hardly found us in necessaries. Our rent was ten shillings a week. We moved into a furnished room for which we paid four shillings, and Kate's mother went to live at the place where she was employed.

Earlier we had a nice flat over a shop, where

we let off one room and so managed very well. A new manager was appointed in the shop, and as he wanted our flat we had to go, though we paid our rent regularly. Here I collected my best library during a fairly good summer, but it had to go in the winter for food. I have never been able to keep anything saleable or pawnable we could do without. But we had some fun there. Many people visited us, and we had musical evenings. There was a rare Christmas party at which we had about a dozen friends. I played the mandolin, violin and flute a very little—just well enough to knock tunes out of them, but I could never keep an instrument long enough to learn it properly. The pawnshop invariably claimed it sooner or later. I was always fond of singing. I and my wife Kate had the same taste in songs. We preferred ballads, old and new. She was once selected for special praise by Princess Christian when she was singing at a concert at Windsor. For my part, my voice had always been unreliable. Sometimes I have moved an audience to wonder; people have exclaimed that they didn't think I "had it in me." At another time I cannot sing a note.

One or two of my friends are professional singers. Of course, I cannot begin to sing so

well as they, but I have heard plenty of people on the stage singing far worse than I do *when* I am in "form." About this time we knew some very nice people whom we used to visit. They were a kind of hybrid between work- and trades-people—very select in their way, but fond of a little fun. We usually spent our Sunday evenings together, either at their house or our flat. They had a large place in "Colonnade Gardens," where they let lodgings. One of their boarders was a cockney girl who, when it came to her turn to sing, used to give us—

"Aw we to pawt like this, Bill,
Aw we to pawt this wye?"

There was a piano at their house which no one of us could play, but my mandolin and a banjo were requisitioned. They were all Irenes, Ethels and Mauds. Even the raucous cockney was "Irene." There was a fair elder sister named commonplace Kate, with whom I fell in love, but when I smelt her breath I thought it far too drastic.

I suppose my readers will know that even married men are liable to fall in love sometimes with other women than their own wives. It is a stupid trick, and really only a compliment to the other women; only, when one is not allowed by fate to have the one woman in whom one

can bury themselves for the rest of their days, these declensions, nearly always harmless and evanescent as they are, are excusable.

After we left this flat we took a small tenement over some stables, which was sub-let to us by a madwoman. Here my son Jocelyn was born. We paid our way, but left because we couldn't stand the landlady, who was more often drunk than sober, and, besides, the rooms swarmed with beetles. Then we tried two or three houses in which we had no luck at letting. The last of these I have described in one of my short stories. It swarmed with all sorts of pests, including rats, which we could hear pattering up and down the stairs as we lay in bed at night, trying to get into our room. Even "Becky," the dog who was with us then, did not keep them away. One night I left half-a-pound of steak on a plate on top of the cupboard for Kate to take for her dinner the next day. In the morning it was gone: the rats had eaten it. It was out of the puppy's reach.

I stood this horrible ramshackle place as long as I could. Afterwards I called the attention of the Sanitary Committee to the state of it and the row in which it stood. But the Town Clerk wrote and said that the Town Council saw no reason for interfering. This is a "health" resort. The

public health authority, which is responsible for its good government, are so obsessed with the fear of touching "private property" that they are afraid to interfere with these pestiferous slums, though an exceptionally hot summer with a long drought may any year turn them into hotbeds of infection which may spread an epidemic through the place, causing incalculable loss and suffering to thousands of the inhabitants. It seems to me that most of our own "civic fathers" seek election rather for party purposes than the good of the community.

We took another set of rooms over a small shop in Junction Road. A girl was in charge of the place who was heavy in the family way by her employer. When her time drew near he closed the shop and got us to take a small house where she could stay with us during her trouble. The man allowed her two pounds a week for her expenses, but she sent the greater part of it home to her mother, who was always worrying her for money. She never fully paid us, though we charged her very little, only eight shillings per week, and Kate stayed at home to nurse her. The child died a short time after its birth from an evil disease.

I saw my own child Jocelyn in convulsions, and I hope never to live to watch anything so

painful again; its poor little body writhing while we could do so little to relieve it. And I watched him slowly fade and change till his face, from being that of a little angel, became more like that of a very, very old man, but his case was nothing to be compared to this poor child's. Its skin peeled off its flesh with its clothes! Think of that, you who live lightly.

I think that from time to time in this narrative I have given its readers a glimpse of my own weaknesses and follies. I have my share, perhaps more than my share. But I claim that we, who are working for better things in life, although we may have our frailties—which are human—have no such crimes on our consciences as have some supporters of the old "respectable" order.

Our next lodger in the house, where I gave the landlord my goods, was a young workwoman who was employed at the same place as Kate. A grey-headed man used to visit her and take her cycling. We naturally thought they were simply an ordinary courting couple, but discovered afterwards that the man was married and had a large family of grown-up children. At last his wife discovered what was going on and our lodger had to fly. She doted on this old man, though she knew perfectly well

that he was married; but she would not give him up. It was after she had left us that I gave that home up.

We remained in furnished rooms for about nine months, and then began to get another home together: the one I lost while in prison. After I came back we lived in a furnished room, where we were literally eaten alive with house-bugs and fleas; the bugs used to drop upon our faces as we lay in bed. Then we got our third home together. We have this still. After trying unfurnished rooms with people who, although we paid them regularly, gave us notice in the spring when unfurnished rooms were difficult to get, we took a pleasant little four-roomed flat, for which we paid seven shillings per week. We have a fair-sized, pleasant bedroom with a grass-green Morris wall-paper, very restful to the eyes, a little sitting-room and kitchen, and we sub-let one room.

I have been unfortunate with my lodgers, they have nearly always turned out to be bad characters. Of course, I am not a Puritan myself and have no great right to complain, but certainly some one steady and quiet would be a change. It is true that the neighbourhood in which our flat was situated, though it contains some few respectable but poor families, has a very bad

reputation, which it deserves. The houses and flats are mostly paltry but highly-rented. Only those who cannot get accommodation in other streets usually go there to live. Often one can hear fights going on, men and women shouting and screaming, using the most abominable language. This may happen any time during the night. Women of sinister reputation live in some of the places, though the authorities have tried to rid the town of them. An effort is being made by some of the house-owners to clear these streets of the bad characters. These places are an illustration of the contention made by Mr. Wells that the people make the slums, for they have not been built long, and had they been properly cared for they might have made passable homes. I understand, however, that a good deal of old timber was used in their construction, and the ground, originally marshland, was made up with house refuse. Hence the vermin in many of them. Except for the nimble flea, which at times appears to be ubiquitous in our town, our flat was free from pests.

I long for a quiet home in the country, with birds and trees and flowers. I have to live in the dusty town. I long to work quietly. I have to struggle on in an environment of din

and squalor and vice. I desire plenty of work so that I can pay my way and we can provide ourselves with the necessaries of life. I have to waste more than half my days in idleness. I am worried from year's end to year's end. We cannot clothe ourselves decently, nor always get good or enough food.

Yes, I am discontented. I have a right to be discontented. I should be unworthy of my manhood if I was not. I have preached the gospel of discontent to others and I shall preach it all the time I have the strength. I have no patience and little pity for the slave who loves his chains.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE PLEASURES OF LIFE

APART from my books, my work for the Socialist movement, and my attempts at literature of late years, my recreations have been necessarily limited by my occupation. Holidays and change have been practically unknown. Except for the fourteen days I spent in prison I was out of Eastbourne only one half day during twelve years!

After having being employed behind the scenes a long while, the theatre would not appeal to me even if I could afford to go to it, except when D'Oyly Carte or grand opera is being presented. It usually happens, however, that when this is the case I have a run of bad luck and cannot spare the necessary money.

Now and then on a wet day or in the evening I used to play dominoes, but I have wearied of public-houses and public-house company. I have given up singing in public. There are few opportunities except in company for which I do not care.

The books I have read have been sundry and manifold, covering some of the best productions of all ages, from early Greece to modern France and America. I have still many I wish to read, though: Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, Jefferies', Borrow's, and Edward Carpenter's works, besides some of Zola's novels. I esteem Zola the greatest writer of modern times.

In science my aim has been to get as near the truth as to the meaning of life as I could. Psychology and biology have been my favourite studies. I owe much to Furneaux, Jordan and the cheap reprints issued by the Rationalist Press Association.

I am not an agnostic from choice: I cannot see the possibility of the existence of an all-good, all-wise God. I cannot express my point of view better than by quoting an extract from a letter of Charles Darwin which appeared in the *Sunday Chronicle* yesterday—

"I am aware that if we admit a first cause the mind still craves to know whence it came and how it arose. Nor can I overlook the difficulty from the amount of suffering through the world. . . . The safest conclusion seems to be that the whole subject is beyond the scope of man's intellect."

And, after all, what does it matter what we

believe or don't believe? A belief in the Christian dogmas does not appear to make the majority of men either better or worse. After all, as individuals we are like grains of dust on a great wheel. Whatever we may think of it, or postulate as to the cause of its revolutions or the end to which it is going, it will still go on undeterred by any opinions or speculations of ours. We attach a great deal too much importance to our individualities, for after all what are we?

> "The eternal Saki from His bowl hath poured
> Millions of bubbles like us, and will pour."

To hear some Christians talk one would think the Creator and Ruler of the universe they postulate has fits every time a mere mortal doubts or denies His existence or questions the probability of some of His attributes as conceived by a tribe of ignorant semi-savages two or three thousand years ago.

Had I remained ignorant of the hard facts of life, never studied, and been comfortably situated, it is possible I might have kept my religion.

When we are not too much worried we have a little singing at home. My daughter Milly is fond of singing and picks up fresh songs very quickly. Our voices are all we can afford

to keep. They will not take them in at the local pawnbroker's.

Then the little writing I do is some consolation. A few stray verses have already been published; one song set to music. I sometimes indulge in story-telling and word-painting in the way of sketches. Competent people tell me they are passable, but the market seems to be overcrowded.

Naturally my study is irregular and much determined by what I can get. George Moore and Thomas Hardy appeal to me most amongst well-known English writers, but there are some coming men who will bear watching each in his own sphere, and Neil Lyons among them. Amongst contemporary journals I prefer the *New Age*, the *Clarion*, and the *Sunday Chronicle*. Very few others appeal to me except the high-priced reviews and magazines—the American magazines for preference. . . .

In this place the screeching and squealing of children, the cursing of drunken or half-drunken men and brawling or screaming women rob one's home life of the quiet rest one needs for study and good work. I have said in a previous chapter that I sometimes have a pint or two of beer. It seems sometimes that I must either have a deep drink or follow the other seven

chair-men to the county asylum, the strain is so great, it reaches almost to the breaking-point. "Let the poor man drink and forget his misery." It costs me less for a week's beer than it does for the wine consumed by some single members of the exploiting class at one meal. With a monotonous worrying occupation one must have some safety valve. The nerves become overwrought. Often the limbs ache from long standing and watching for work. One gets tired, faint and numbed for want of proper and sufficient food. In the summer one is baked standing in the sun, in the winter blown about and shivering in the bitter winds.

Besides I am by nature inordinately vain, and I need some counteracting weakness to keep me befittingly humble.

CHAPTER XXVII

MY SOCIALIST WORK

After the Eastbourne Fabian Society had melted away in 1893, I took no active part in politics till 1895; then being rather better off, I spent a good deal of money distributing copies of the *Clarion* and the cheap reprint of *Merrie England*. Of the latter I sold or gave away over five hundred copies. The result was the birth of a new local Socialist organization. We called ourselves the "Clarion Scouts," and met in various coffee-houses. From one of them we were expelled by the proprietor, who had been frightened into doing so by a local carpenter, a rabid Tory, who told him we were anarchists and engaged in the manufacture of bombs.

Our Fabian Society had consisted mainly of reporters and comps. The "Scouts" contained mostly comps and carpenters. They were all bright, intelligent young men. In those days the Socialist party was the party of all the talents. It was small, but select. Now the Lord only knows what to call it. We again had our old friend H. R. Smart to speak for us. At this,

as at his previous meeting in '93, he had the irrepressible Quirk, a well-known local heckler, to deal with; and it was generally admitted that he tied him up into knots. Among our members was a young actor who was resting. He proved a tower of strength to us with his acute common-sense and knowledge of the world. In the autumn a local House of Commons was formed; some of us joined it, sitting on the cross benches. I was member for N.-E. Manchester. I wanted to sit for South-West Ham, but some one else was before me. We had some rare fun, joining in most of the debates. We had one sitting allotted to us, when I moved a resolution in favour of the Initiative and Referendum. It was a packed house, and I suppose I made myself interesting, as I was granted an extension of time. The motion was defeated by four votes—fifty-six against, fifty-two for.

This was the year of my marriage. The next spring I got into trouble, and went to London to look for different work. There I heard Mr. H. M. Hyndmann at the old S.D.F. Hall in the Strand.

Once before when I was in London I got in touch with one or two men at the Communist Club near Tottenham Court Road, and to the "Club Autonomie" in the same neighbourhood.

At the latter I spent the greater part of one night at a concert and ball. The Anarchists who formed the club evidently knew how to enjoy themselves. They had the assistance of several music-hall artistes late in the evening after, I suppose, they had fulfilled their engagements. The next night I attended a meeting of the group, when they talked "business," most of which appeared to be very inconsequential. Among them was an ex-Fenian and a philosophical Englishman who had travelled a great deal. This man gave a long account of a community established in one of the Western States—Montana or Washington—which had realized and lived the simple life. One of our own members at Eastbourne gave us a long account of the Oneida Community at one of our meetings. I have always been deeply interested in these efforts to realize a better life. I suppose the failure of most of these Collectivist colonies is mainly due to the fact that man has not yet developed sufficiently to live the higher, more unselfish life it demands.

At the same time I believe I am right in saying that the Oneida Community would not have failed but for the interference of the state authorities, and in the island of Tristan da Cunha, where there is neither workhouse nor prison

(there being neither crime nor pauperism to make such institutions necessary), we have an example of what might be expected to follow were Society to resolve itself into the Collectivist form generally.

While I was in London my letters were sent to the old *Clarion* office at Fleet Street, where I used to call for them; but I never saw any of the staff except "The Mac Wilkinson," and unfortunately my name has never figured on the *Clarion* pay-sheet. The dear old "Bounder" had met with a cycle accident, and was in hospital with a damaged arm. I read of his death a short time after my return to Eastbourne, and, I am not ashamed to say it, I happen to know that Julia Dawson's washerwoman was not the only one who cried over that calamity. Just as I always read A. Neil Lyons now-a-days immediately I get my *Clarion*, I used then to read the "Bounder." He was a most delightful companion in print. In fact, when he used to write the immortal "front page"—immortal in the memories of those who read and prized it—I used sometimes to wish he would say more and use a smaller number of stars. There were giants in the movement in those days, men who could wield the "pottle-pot" as well as the pen; men who even if they suffered occasionally with a

number nine hump, could also smile on occasion with a number nine smile. But now-a-days we have to conform to the manners and are expected to have the intelligence of Sunday school scholars. I wonder how many "Clarion Fellowships" would consider a man like Pay tame and "respectable" enough to be admitted to their membership?

When I returned to Eastbourne I had very little work for a long time, and could not help the Scouts at all. They gradually fell away, and the organization ceased to exist. While unemployed this time I was given casual jobs by Walter Stretton, who had set up in business for himself, and Mr. Fowler, the well-known bookseller in Cornfield Road. I have to thank the latter for many kindnesses.

When I got back to work again I made several unsuccessful efforts to form another local Socialist society, but though I failed I got to know one of my best friends, Edward C—— of Hastings, who has remained my friend "through good report and ill report" ever since. For some years, being the greater part of the time the only Socialists in our respective towns, we maintained a regular correspondence, and he biked over to see me every now and then. Then he formed a branch of the S.D.F. at Hastings, which fell

through after a time, but it put him in touch with E. J. Pay, a very active Socialist worker who has been invaluable to the movement in the south-eastern counties since.

After the general election of '06 I got in touch with other *Clarion* readers in Eastbourne. I put a notice in the *Clarion* convening a meeting. Seven attended this, and they promised to bring others. An "assembly" of the Clarion Fellowship was formed, of which I was chosen secretary. In six weeks our membership had grown to twenty-four, and in three months to over forty. We organized a series of open-air meetings, at the first of which we had E. J. Pay of Tunbridge Wells and Joe Young of Brighton as speakers; this being a great success we continued them, and they have been carried on in the summer months ever since.

Having succeeded in organizing Eastbourne Socialistically, I turned my attention to Sussex and the adjacent counties. I found there were a few societies scattered about them, but they were mostly disconnected and they left ample room for more. So I called a meeting at Eastbourne on the first Sunday in August, inviting representatives from the various societies in Kent, Sussex, Surrey and Hampshire to attend with a view of forming a federation. The meeting was

very successful. I had captured F. T. Richards, M.P. for West Wolverhampton, for the outdoor meetings. The room in which we called the conference was all too small; the people overflowed into adjoining rooms and half-way down the stairs. A lively debate ensued. All present were in favour of my idea, only some wanted a separate organization for each county, others the big scheme covering all four counties. Finally the larger scheme was agreed to, the majority of the Surrey delegates dissenting, but as they went away and formed an organization on the same lines for their own county no harm was done.

The fundamental idea in both the South-Eastern and the Surrey County Federations, and afterwards the Essex County Committee, which came into being in imitation of what we had done, was to get Socialists of all names and grades to work together for organization and propaganda, and that idea has been carried out in all three organizations. They are open alike to S.D.P. and I.L.P. branches, *Clarion* organizations, and local Fabian and independent Socialist societies. Of course I had been aware for years of the antagonism between I.L.P.'er and S.D.F.'er, but I felt then, as I feel now, that such antagonism was unworthy of the

Socialist cause. Personally, though I have had occasion to quarrel with the *official* attitude of the I.L.P., I never had any violent leanings either way. I was always simply a "Clarionette," and that, with a strong "New Age" bias, expresses my present frame of mind. The present strength of the party in this country is undoubtedly due more to the efforts of the *Clarion* and its writers than any other one agency.

I was elected secretary of the South-Eastern Federation, which I at once set to work to establish on a firm basis. I had thrown myself with the utmost enthusiasm into the formation of the local "Clarion Fellowship," spending time and money upon it I could ill afford, and making enemies galore; and I did the same with the Federation. But I found I could not keep pace with the work entailed by remaining secretary of both organizations, so I gave up that of the local society in favour of the larger one. The various branches in the three counties rapidly sent in their affiliation papers—and fees. Some of the local "comrades" laughed at me when I first proposed the formation of the Federation, and prophesied failure, but I soon showed them their mistake, and they never forgave me.

During the first few months I had the help

of all three recognized Socialist organs—the *Clarion, Justice* and the *Labour Leader*. I did not appeal to the *New Age* because that journal does not engage in the work of organization. After a time, however, the support of the *Labour Leader* was withdrawn. I wrote to Francis Johnson, the national secretary of the I.L.P., asking for the reason. He replied that the N.A.C. were forming exclusively I.L.P. Federations throughout the country, and that they "did not approve of hybrid Federations"; this in spite of the fact that they had been instructed to "co-operate with other Socialist organizations wherever possible" by their own National Conference! Similarly J. R. Macdonald wrote a letter to me telling me he should advise the I.L.P. not to co-operate with the S.D.P. whenever asked.

I saw that the South-Eastern Federation was in danger of disintegration. I was not unprepared for this attack, because the North-Eastern Socialist Federation had been split up by the same influence the previous year; and receiving intimation from one or two local secretaries that the work of disruption was already beginning, I determined to make a tour round the three counties to try to stop it. Having been thrown out of work once more, I had ample time on my hands, and I thought I might possibly see or

hear of some other occupation in one or the other of the towns I should visit.

I left my wife and Milly at home, but not entirely unprovided for, through the kindness of some of my friends.

I was thrown out of work on Monday the 13th of May, 1907, but I waited until the following Thursday before starting, as the S.D.P. branch at Hastings held its weekly meeting on that night. I travelled there from Eastbourne by rail-motor, and was very kindly received both by my old friends Mr. and Mrs. Cruttenden and the local society. I explained the object of my tour to them, and they approved of it, giving me, the former hospitality for the night, and the latter three shillings towards my expenses.

The next day I rode to Appledore and walked the rest of the way into Ashford, which was my next calling place. It was a long, weary walk by a flat winding road. I was very low-spirited, wondering whether I had done right in leaving home and what would happen to me. The branch at Ashford I thought one of the most disaffected ones; but it proved amenable to reason, and has remained loyal ever since.

I was treated very well indeed by the local comrades. They subscribed handsomely towards my expenses, and entertained me cordially.

They foregathered every evening in a small bar at the back of the "Saracen's Head," and I was lodged in a very quaint old house in North Street, the oldest house, it was said, in the town. Here my host, a baker, enlivened the evenings with selections from *I Pagliacci* and *Il Trovatore* on a very good gramophone.

I stayed in Ashford from Friday till Monday. On the Sunday evening some of the members of the branch took me for a walk towards Canterbury. We passed through some woods which were literally carpeted with bluebells. On the Monday morning I and my host ran to the station to catch an early train to Folkestone, but missed it by the fraction of a second. Ashford is a landlord- and parson-ridden place where the Socialists have to lie very low.

On reaching Folkestone I first called upon an old stalwart of the movement named Harry Brown, with whom I had been corresponding with reference to the formation of a local branch of the I.L.P. He had formerly worked with Will Crooks in Poplar, and was active in the great Dock Strike in London. However, as he was leaving Folkestone for Caterham, he could do nothing there; but a branch has been formed since, and is, I believe, thriving.

I had also had some correspondence with Mr.

H. G. Wells on the subject of a local organization, it being part of my duty as secretary of the Federation to hunt up Socialists who lived in unorganized towns and districts, and to get them, if possible, to form societies. So I made my way to his beautiful house at Sandgate, wondering what kind of a reception I should meet with. Although I was flushed with my success at Ashford, I must confess I felt awkward and nervous, but Mr. Wells received me kindly and asked me to return later to lunch.

It being early, about ten o'clock in fact, I took a long walk over the beautiful Leas down into Folkestone. *En passant* I had a talk with some bath chair-men whom I saw on their stands. They did not appear very prosperous, and told me that where they hired their chairs they paid their owners a third of their takings for the use of them. This, considering the uncertainty of the work, is far more equitable than a standing weekly rent.

I found the Leas very exhilarating, but was surprised to see so few people round the band for a Bank Holiday.

Returning to Spade House, Mr. Wells asked me into his fine study, where we discussed the work I was doing. Afterwards we went in to lunch, at which function I felt particularly awk-

ward, because always at public or private meals I had always had the various viands placed on my plate in front of me. But here I found I was expected to help myself from dishes passed over my shoulder by the attendant parlourmaid. However, Mr. and Mrs. Wells chatted easily of the Socialist movement in England and America—we were all interested just then in the fate of Meyer, Heywood and Pettibone, the officials of the Western Federation of Miners who were on trial in Idaho for murder. There was another guest present, and after lunch our host showed us over the gardens, which overlooked the sea at such a great height that cross-channel steamers appeared no larger than small rowing-boats. We had coffee and cigarettes on the lawn, where one of Mr. Wells' little sons brought me some pansies.

I found Folkestone in the afternoon crowded with Cockney and French trippers, so as there was nothing further for me to do there I went on by rail to Dover. Here the I.L.P. branch was installed in convenient club-rooms in Biggan Street, just above the Market Square. I liked Dover. It seemed a free and easy kind of place. I made friends with a local hotel-keeper and a telephone employee, both of them members of the I.L.P., and they took me about a good deal. I addressed an open-air meeting in the

Market Square, and one of a branch of the Railway Women's Guild at the I.L.P. Club.

The first object which met my eyes when I awoke in the morning was the castle, symbol of the oppression and the power of the dominating predatory classes looking down on the emissary of revolt. The Dover people were very kind. During my stay I received ten shillings from J. Taylor Clarke, the National Secretary of the Clarion Fellowship, towards my expenses. Though when I wrote him for assistance I meant it in the way of information and advice, the financial help was welcome.

From Dover I went by train to Ramsgate, where, although there was no branch, I had a correspondent. He, however, was not at home, so I took the electric tram into Margate. Here it was proposed to form some sort of a society with the help of A. J. Webster, of the S.D.P. executive, who had a house in the town; but as there was no occasion for me to stay I pushed on to Canterbury. Here again I was disappointed: my correspondent there, who wanted to form a local Fabian Society, was away at Deal, and my funds were getting very, very low. I should like to have stayed in the premier city, too. Who has read and reread *David Copperfield* and would not?

So I pushed on to Faversham, riding part of the way and walking the rest through miles of hop fields, arriving in the evening tired out. But John K——, my correspondent there (there was no local organization), made me very welcome. He was one of the few men I met on my tour to whom I took a strong liking. A big, strongly-built man, a "reader from the first" of the *Clarion*, greatly interested in his garden, in which he cultivated the luscious and blushing tomato. He took me down into the town at night and showed me the old town hall standing on pillars with the market place beneath, and the old Elizabethan houses, spoilt, many of them, by modern "improvements." The streets were crowded for a little place like Faversham. It was a Saturday night, and the people were walking leisurely about the roadways, as there was little or no vehicular traffic. It seemed a beautiful old place to me, and I fancy I should like to spend a good long holiday there.

Later we foregathered at an inn with one or two kindred spirits. A thunderstorm with heavy rain came on, and we sat and chatted till it was "time." On the Sunday morning I did a mean thing purposely. There were four of us, John, his pleasant wife and daughter, and myself, and there were only three rashers of bacon. One of

us had to have cold pie, and I decided that John should. So I ate his rasher with all the more relish because I liked him and wanted to place myself under as much obligation as possible to him. They lived in a pleasant new house with large gardens, the rent of which was about half what such a one would fetch in Eastbourne; and the local rates were eleven shillings in the pound!

After breakfast John pointed out my road to Sittingbourne, the next town on my itinerary. Here, too, I found my correspondent, one of two brothers whom I had nicknamed "The Busy Bs," because of their activity in the movement, away at Chatham. But he returned shortly afterwards, and overtook me along the Sheerness road on his bicycle. He took me to a roadside inn, and "signified the same in the usual way," giving me two shillings besides, at which I was exceeding glad, for I was tired, thirsty, and 'broke." The other "busy B" had been agitating at Westgate-on-Sea, but up to that time neither of them had succeeded in making a start. Later I had to pay a penny to cross the railway bridge to the Isle of Sheppey, where is the ancient fortress of Sheerness. From Faversham to Sheerness was one of my longest walks.

I received a kind welcome from the comrades

at Sheerness. One of them took me to the Working Men's Club, which they claim to be the finest out of London. It certainly is a handsome institution, standing in its own grounds, and is the freehold property of its members, all of whom are working-men. It has grown with the co-operative movement, and has been built up by its members without any extraneous aid or "patronage." It contains a large lecture-hall, where meetings and entertainments are held during the winter months, and has a large lawn for garden-parties in the summer. It has a big billiard-room—four tables—a very capacious refreshment bar devoted on one side to intoxicants and on the other to tea, coffee and other temperance drinks, in addition to smoking- and reading-rooms, all of which are handsomely decorated. Ladies are admitted to certain rooms. All profits are expended in lectures, entertainments, and treats to the members' children. This has been achieved by men in steady employment in the dockyards.

I did not see much of the town, as I left the next day. The branch was a fairly strong one, but it was not pushing its propaganda by open-air meetings out of deference to the feelings of other people. It seemed strange here to have to climb up to the sea instead of going down to it.

The next day I went to Gillingham, where an active agent of the N.A.C. was secretary of the local I.L.P. The sole surviving member of the Strood S.D.P. entertained me at his lodgings in that long street in Chatham which is mentioned in *Tono-Bungay*, Luton Street. Chatham lies in a hollow between hills almost as steep as those at Hastings. Mean streets everywhere—mean houses clustering close under Rochester Cathedral. My host, who was secretary of the Chatham Trades Council, was busy circularizing the trades councils throughout the country, but he proved urbane and informing.

The next morning I walked by way of Gravesend and Dartford to Bexley Heath—a long, tiring walk, the first part of the way through the Dickens country. My funds were very, very low. At Gravesend nearly every one appeared to be out of work, but there was an active I.L.P. Club with a Socialist Sunday school attached. At Dartford E. V. Hartley gave me a ripping tea and a shilling, so I boarded the electric tram into Bexley Heath.

Here, and at Erith the next day, I found a good deal of active work going on. In the wife of the comrade who put me up I met one of the few active Socialist women workers I have known. I stayed there two or three days, and

then walked into London, making my way by Plumstead, Woolwich and Lewisham. I made for the *Clarion* office thoroughly tired out, but no one was in except the MacW., then I went on to 21A, Maiden Lane, where I fared much better. H. W. Lee, the secretary of the S.D.P., was in; he was as busy as the proverbial bee in the oft-mentioned tar barrel, but he made time to take me round the corner and give me a good lunch. He also lent me a shilling.

It was a dull, damp evening. It had been raining the greater part of the time I had been away from Eastbourne, though providentially it had kept fine for me during my long walks.

At night I attended a meeting of the Clarion Van Committee at Chandos Hall. I explained the object of my tour, and they made a collection for me amounting to 5*s*. 6*d*., which was very acceptable. I forgot to mention that I had caught a severe cold at Margate, through which I had almost entirely lost my voice. I put up at Bruce House in Drury Lane for the night, my bed costing me sevenpence. The next morning I rose early, and as I could not get a parcel I had left at the office, I took a long walk through Kingsway (which I had never seen before), Oxford Street and Park Lane back to Bruce House, thinking all kinds of thoughts,

my predominating impression being that I should be very glad to get out into the country again.

After waiting impatiently for some time I got my parcel from the office at Bruce House, and having paid H. W. Lee the shilling he so kindly lent me, took train to Penge, my first calling place on my homeward journey. Here I had a vegetarian dinner with A. J. Taylor and his wife. He had been a frequent speaker for us at Eastbourne, so that it was a treat to see a familiar face again.

At Penge, Beckenham, Bromley and round about, our workers were very active. I went from Penge to Bromley, where I had the honour and pleasure of taking tea with Margaret MacMillan, to whom, as a member of the N.A.C., I was glad to be able to state my case. She proved a good listener, and fully sympathized with my point of view. A fine, well-built Scotswoman, she has done yeoman service in the cause of Socialism, and I shall always remember with pleasure the afternoon I spent at her house. She suggested she should introduce me to Prince Kropotkin, but we sat talking so long that it became too late, and I had to walk on to Sidcup.

At Sidcup I met the second of my two most

intimate friends. The first was Edward C—— of Hastings. This was a comrade who had been my chief adviser and supporter since I had been secretary of the Federation. I had felt from his letters that I should like him, so that I was anxious to see him.

I was more than satisfied with him. A fine, tall, genial Scot, urbane and cultured. I haven't his permission to say exactly what position he fills: he is as modest as he is valuable, and prefers that his name should be suppressed. But I may say that he occupies a responsible position on the staff of a well-known weekly journal and that his name is Hugh. He took me to a friend's, where I stayed till the Sunday, he, of course, spending as much time with us as he possibly could, but not half so much as I should have liked. Unfortunately it rained the greater part of the time, so that a look round the neighbourhood was out of the question. I gathered that the local I.L.P. had been subjected to the fire of bourgeois persecution, many of its members having been discharged from their work and given notice to quit their houses because of their political opinions. On Sunday morning we walked by way of Chislehurst to the nearest railway station for Sevenoaks, a pleasant walk enlivened by tales and talk. Hugh assisted me

financially as well as by his friendly encouragement.

Several years previous to this, when we Socialists in the South of England were like the elect, "one of a city and two of a tribe," on one of my occasional pilgrimages to London in search of employment I had made the acquaintance of a comrade at Sevenoaks, and I looked forward to meeting him again. It was the post-master at Sevenoaks who had told me where to find him on my previous visit. He had happened to be at home, alone in the house, and he had regaled me with bottled beer and jam tarts, while he read extracts of a play he was writing. On this occasion he was at the station to meet me, but I did not recognize him. However, he was pointed out to me, and after showing me a new club house and some pretty cottages they had built through the local co-operative society, he gave me dinner at the "Yew Tree," regretting he could not take me home as he and some friends were going away that afternoon to a picnic. The Sevenoaks Clarion Fellowship was one of the eleven societies brought into being during my year of office owing directly or indirectly to our agitation.

I found I should have to wait some time for

the next train to Tonbridge, so I decided to walk, hoping to get there in time to see the local secretary and catch the train to Tunbridge Wells, where I was anxious to spend the night. However, it took longer than I thought, so I had to give the Tonbridge branch a "bye." The roads about this part of Kent are very beautiful, so I suppose that is why I did not hurry. I reached "the Wells" early in the evening, and had some difficulty in finding the local secretary. I had forgotten that they held afternoon meetings on the Common, and it seems that while I was searching for him he was inquiring for me. However, I found one of the S.D.P.'ers at last, and my old friend Joe Young, who was the speaker for the day, at tea with him. This was quite satisfactory. I listened to a discourse at night on "The Reward of Genius," which interested the crowd so much that they stayed till nearly ten o'clock, and I had to make a bolt into a closing pub to get some tobacco—it was too late for a glass of beer.

The next morning, instead of turning to the left to Maidstone, as I should have done, the magnet of home drew me back to Eastbourne. I walked to Heathfield, from which I rode to Hailsham to give myself a rest, and then walked the rest of the way home, where I was wel-

comed by Kate and Mildred after my long journey.

Joe Young had invited me to go over to Brighton and give an account of my tour with the causes which led me to undertake it to his society, the S.D.P. I walked the twenty-three miles and found it very tiring. However, I did not regret it afterwards, for I found the Brighton comrades most kind, not to say cordial. They fully approved of what I had done for the movement, and at the suggestion of Will Evans, a most useful speaker who was at the time on the Town Council, they gave me quite a handsome collection. I stayed the night with Joe Young. I had not quite made up my mind whether to go on by way of Worthing to Portsmouth and Southampton or to return to Eastbourne. As it poured in torrents the next morning and I had no overcoat with me, I decided upon turning back. There was really no occasion for me to go on, as I had no reason to think the Hampshire comrades disaffected.

Whenever I was given an opportunity to address the members of the various societies, and in every case, except at Gillingham, where I saw the secretary, I was successful in retaining and strengthening their adherence to the Federation. Everywhere without exception I was

treated with the utmost courtesy and kindness, and those three weeks will always contain fragrant memories for me.

I returned to Eastbourne in the beginning of June. Our annual conference was held on the first Sunday in August at the Great Hall Restaurant, Tunbridge Wells. Here a vote of censure upon J. R. Macdonald was carried by a large majority, although a friend of his named Paul Campbell tried to defend his position. Having put the Federation on a satisfactory footing, I had intended for a long while to resign my office at the end of the year; this I did, and a Tunbridge Wells man named Veals, who having greater leisure than I and being a cyclist was able to make himself more useful to the different branches. I had carried out my year's secretarial work at a total cost of £2 5*s*.

The Federation is still flourishing, and I believe the ideal it stands for—the co-operation of the various sections of the Socialist party—will ultimately find acceptance throughout the movement. Just now there is a good deal of ferment in it. On the one hand is the conservative element pulling towards mere Labourism—perhaps Liberalism; on the other the uncompromising Socialists who see no sense in being led out of the swamps of the old political parties

with the idea of forming a definite independent Socialist party of their own only to be led back again.

Although I have ceased to take a very active part in politics for some time, I am entirely in sympathy with the latter. Some day the workers will tire of mere politicians of every shade and will organize themselves for the definitive struggle with Capitalism. Then, thoroughly grounded in the economics *and* ethics of Socialism, they will know what to do. It will be no great loss to the idle rich for them to have to live useful, healthy lives, nor to the business man to be relieved of the ever-increasing strain of competition. The worker will have no fear of unemployment or of want through sickness or old age. The reign of hatred engendered by the competition of individuals and the war of classes will give place to that of "Peace on earth, goodwill to men."

CHAPTER XXVIII

TRYING TO CLIMB

BEING free from the duties imposed upon me by my political work, I set myself during the following winter to try to solve a problem which had presented itself to me for some time, *i. e.* how to so improve the phonograph as to make it, in combination with the cinematograph, produce entire plays or operas.

I had no instrument of my own with which to experiment, nor means with which to get models made to my designs; but I studied, as far as I could, all the various factors involved, and finally got out a set of drawings showing how, allowing for every contingency (as I thought), the tubular records could be lengthened to almost any given extent. These, by a mechanism which I designed, could be carried at the right speed and with the right number of revolutions under the needle of the phonograph.

I submitted my drawings with explanatory notes to Messrs. Pathé Frères, the Edison-Bell Record Co. and others, with the same result: they all "regretted to say they did not think

my idea could be made commercially successful."

I have hinted in previous chapters that I have written songs and stories from time to time; while at the theatre I wrote a play and submitted *scenarios* for two or three musical comedies to Mr. George Edwardes, but, like my stories, they were failures.

After I had grown tired of trying to get my phonograph idea taken up, I began to write this story at Mr. Wells' suggestion, varying it with a treatise on ethics and one or two works of fiction, but failure to get any of these accepted has instilled a much needed measure of modesty into my estimate of my own powers.

Yet it is needful that I should do something different to bath chair-work. This is growing more unreliable every year. I began this year by being out four weeks in January for four shillings and sixpence! Then I had two experiences of Corporation relief work.

It was so many years since I had done any heavy manual labour that I looked forward to my new occupation with some misgivings. I understood, however, that I should only be employed a week, and, any way, anything was better than standing about doing nothing. So with some trepidation, but a determination to

do my best, I walked down to the "relief" work at the place appointed.

It was a bright, cold morning, the ground covered with hoar-frost. I had to walk rather more than a mile from my house; that, however, made me warm. The Corporation was laying out a new recreation ground for the people of the East End, on the Crumbles. These "Crumbles," as they are called, are wide stretches of shingle left by the sea, which has been receding from this part of the coast for centuries. Inland from them lies Pevensey Castle. This is now fully two miles from the high water line. When it was first built the sea washed its walls.

I found a large number of men of all sorts and trades gathered round an open fire. I gave my post-card to the foreman, who, after blowing his whistle at eight o'clock, directed the men to their various tasks. I, with others, had to remove clay from a large heap to a man who was spreading it over the rough beach to form a foundation for the turf. It was very heavy work. The clay had to be loaded into wheelbarrows and run along planks to the spreader. It was hard to get up, sticky and half frozen, and I, being inexperienced, had selected a poor shovel and had not provided myself with a pick.

I found I could wheel the barrows moderately full, but not very full, and that was the one and only time I got into trouble with the foreman, either during the six days I put in on this job or three I had at another later on. On the second day I told him I could not wheel the barrows loaded as he wanted them; I told him I did not mind loading them, but for me to trundle them along the planks was a physical impossibility. He jeered at me on account of my ordinary occupation as bath chair-man, but he let me have my way. If he hadn't I should have had to give up the job.

The work made me very stiff. I could scarcely walk home. When I sat down anywhere it was agony to get up again, but I stuck to it till the Saturday. The last three days we had to deal with rough turf instead of the heavy clay, which was a change for the better. But it was still very hard work, harder than it need have been, because, though we had one shirker in our gang, we had two or three men who had got used to it and made the pace rather warm, probably with the hope of obtaining more employment. Besides the pain in my back I had one under my right shoulder-blade, which stayed with me all the time. We left off work at 12.30 on Saturday. I spent the afternoon resting and

reading the *Woman Worker*, the *New Age*, and the *Clarion*—I had been too tired to read all the week. At night I sat on our kitchen table to get near the gas to read; in getting down the pain in my side suddenly intensified and something seemed to turn over inside me. I was almost helpless; I could not stoop to take my boots off, and managed to get up-stairs only with great difficulty. Undressing and getting into bed resolved itself into a very labour of Hercules. I spent a wretched night: every time I moved or coughed I endured such agony I thought I should faint.

The next day I could not move, nor the next, at which I was sincerely sorry, as I might have had three days more work. We were paid five-pence an hour for a seven-hour day, and as funds were very low at home I should have been glad of the money. For the same reason I could not pay for a doctor; so, much against the grain, I had to send for the parish one. I hope he doesn't treat all the patients he is paid out of the rates to attend to with the same brusqueness. Still, I suppose that when a man has got so low that he has to apply for medical relief it doesn't much matter whether he recovers or not. Probably in nine cases out of ten it would be better for him if he didn't. I hope I may

not injure him with his employers, the Board of Guardians, if I say I found the relieving officer who came to see me more humane and considerate.

I began to get about again towards the end of the week, and was engaged during the next week or two upon this story. Then another post-card arrived, telling me to report myself for work on the King's Drive. This is a splendid new road the Council have built, connecting Eastbourne with Hampden Park, and this winter they have been carrying out its surface drainage with unemployed labour. I had been told that the work was harder than that on the Crumbles, but though I had tried I could not get a chair, so I was very glad of the chance to get the work. It was real navvy's work, and I wondered how I should get on with it.

The foreman put me to get up the trench with pick and shovel at first, then seeing, I suppose, that I was not used to it, he gave me a job as "stage" man: that is to say, I had to stand on the edge of the trench and shovel the débris back as the men got it out, keeping a clear space for three workers below. We worked on Thursday and Friday in a bleak wind with a good deal of snow in it, eight hours instead of seven, but I found it did not tire me

nearly so much as the clay. The materials of which the road was made up were not so heavy. I had a good shovel, which I could easily keep clean and, by adopting a methodical way of working, I kept my end up pretty well. Still, it was tiring, and the sound of the foreman's whistle, telling us to knock off for lunch or dinner or at five o'clock for the day, was welcome.

On the Saturday the ground was covered with snow, and we were all set to work clearing the pavements. This was a change, but it was harder work on account of the weight of the brooms used, and much to my disgust I found myself on Sunday morning unable to move with the old pain in my side. It was the same on Monday. This made me angry, because not only did it make me appear foolish and incapable, but it did me out of a week's work—and nineteen shillings in wages. I got up on the Thursday morning determined that I *would* work; but I proposed, my muscular rheumatism, pleurisy, or whatever it is, disposed. I soaked myself in spirits of turpentine till I smelt horribly, but I did not send for that parish doctor again. I was very sorry about this last breakdown; I did not dislike my work as "stage man" nor the foreman, nor did I mind the snow

sweeping, but even I cannot do impossibilities, and it is impossible to do hard, heavy work which necessitates constant movement when your side feels as though it was in an iron vice and every cough and motion sends a dart through your lungs.

I have been for a great many years deeply interested in the unemployed problem, but this is the first time I have worked amongst them. Although the work given them is quite unlike what most of them have been used to, there are very few shirkers amongst them; mostly they try to work as hard as they can. Many of them have wives and large families dependent upon them, so that it seems absurd to employ them for about one week in four, which appears to be the rule. It is true they occasionally receive tickets for coal and food in their "off" weeks from the Mayor's Poor Fund, but how far do these go towards keeping perhaps four, five or more persons? One of our councillors has persistently denied that there is any distress in Eastbourne. He has always moved the rejection of any grant in aid to the town from the funds available in the hands of the Local Government Board. He is a Tory (I always call people of this party Tory, everybody knows what I mean, and they change the name they

call themselves so often). I do not know whether he is a married man or not (only married men are employed on the relief works), but if he is I should like him to be unemployed in Eastbourne just one winter and see how he could live and support those dependent on him on one week's wages of from sixteen to nineteen shillings in four, with a few grocery and coal tickets in between!

But, of course, working people, especially the poor and unemployed, belong to a different race from the exalted class whose interest the well-to-do party looks after. It doesn't matter whether they eat or starve, live or die, there will be always plenty left to exploit for the rents and profits upon which the "gentry" live.

I trust the reports of the Poor Law Commission will have some effect in bettering things for the unemployed before long. I did hope the Labour Party would have done something before now, but most of its leaders appear to be more concerned in taming the Party which sent them to Parliament to their own hands than in endeavouring to forward the interests of their supporters. The latest news is that Independent Labour Party branches are not allowed to communicate with each other respecting the

resolutions they wish to submit to its Annual Conference: they must move only to the strings it suits J. R. Macdonald to pull. The workers, apparently, so far as politicians of every shade care, can go on working when they are wanted for a bare subsistence wage, and when their services are not required they may still be permitted to slink into some out-of-the-way corner and starve.

The whole situation makes me sick at heart and weary. We preach and organize, spend our years in labouring to encourage the workers to unite together to bring about a more sane and just social order, to lift the burdens from their shoulders which grind them into the dust, to abolish once and for all the crying shame of the willing man seeking work and finding none, and then some interested jack in office comes along fostering dissension and division for his own personal ends. What is the use of all our devotion and sacrifice when any specious trickster can undo half what we have done? While there will be always those from other classes who will, from very nobility of soul, devote themselves to the cause of the workers, these last must look to themselves for their own salvation, and that will never come until they stand by those,

whether of their own class or not, who serve them from love and refuse to listen to those who wish to mislead and exploit them. The workers can save themselves when they want to—collectively. The system they have to overthrow is a ridiculous monstrosity; one good heave all together and it would disappear 'mid a storm of derision and laughter.

And so my long tale draws to an end. It has taken a long while to write and revise: I have had only just an hour or two a day to give to it, as since February 1909 I have been out with a chair again.

Our work has grown more uncertain than ever. Many weeks I earn less than ten shillings even in the summer time. Besides, since my illness last autumn I have never been quite well. There are days together when I have to force myself to eat. I feel weary of everything: of the long struggle which never seems to leave me any farther ahead, of the wretched uncertain life, and the never ending worry.

I have written of my wife's work as an ironer. That used to help us considerably: she could nearly always earn ten shillings a week and over up to this year. But now, often, she can get no work at all, and when she gets any the

prices paid for it (she is a piece worker) are so small that she seldom earns more than eight shillings, even for a full week. In two of the laundries she has tried this year the prices paid were very low and the women had no books or papers to show the amount of work they did. She has just been discharged from one of these places because, finding they had cheated her out of a shilling, by keeping an account of the work she did herself, she complained of it. The owner of this laundry can buy houses: his workers must find it difficult to buy bread.

How we shall get through the coming winter I don't know. Still, somehow we seem to have kept on through the years almost as by a miracle: always on the edge of the abyss, never quite sinking into it. Seldom getting far away from the edge. When there has been a little luck of any kind it has usually been accompanied by some sickness or some other trouble which has counterbalanced it.

* * * * *

To those who are inclined to blame me for my politics I ask, can you show me any better way? Christianity in various forms has been tried for nearly two thousand years, and has failed. Liberalism and Conservatism have been

tried, and they have failed. So far as the workers are concerned the attitude of Christians, Liberals and Conservatives, as such, is uncompromisingly hostile.

Suppose all the schemes of Social Reform which are "in the air" (and likely to remain there so far as I can see) are adopted: supposing the hungry school children are fed, necessitous mothers are endowed, unemployed working men maintained, all the aged pensioned, all the sick and disabled adequately cared for: what will you have then? On the one hand still the wealthy exploiting class, on the other a class of slaves and paupers. Bread would be assured, it is true, but is bread everything? Is there nothing to be said for manhood?

At the time of writing—nearly six months after the bulk of this book was written—I take little part and little interest in current politics. I am weary of all the lying, the meanness and trickery it involves. I just bury myself in the books I am reading (Browning, Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Virgil, Lucretius) and the stories I am trying to write. Some day, perhaps, justice will come by her own: men will learn to live natural and honourable lives.

But until the conscience of humanity has so

developed that men will no more think of exploiting their fellow men than they now think, in civilized lands at least, of buying and selling them in the slave-market, there will always be such wasted lives as mine. And most men, living as they do under unjust, unnatural, unhealthy conditions, do live wasted lives.

EPILOGUE

In the foregoing pages it has been my painful duty to record many unpleasant things. I was bound by the terms of my agreement with Mr. Wells to be truthful, and I could not write smooth things and at the same time fulfil my agreement. But now in these last few pages I have to tell of brighter days. Easier, more peaceful days already experienced, and still brighter ones in view.

After I had finished the revision of the last chapter and sent this work to Messrs. Constable, things grew from bad to worse. The chair work was irregular and unsatisfactory owing to the keen competition and the unsettled weather. My poor wife walked from laundry to laundry, but could not get a start. The person who owned the chair I hired worried me daily for his rent, and as I seldom earned ten shillings a week I could not pay him much.

I suppose as I am now strong I ought to be merciful. I am, as a rule, forgiving; but I find it hard to forgive, or at least to forget, this man. He made my life such a burden to me this

summer. He had four bath chairs. One was let to a butcher who had been frozen out of his calling by the frozen meat industry. One was let to an elderly man who had been a groom at one time in the service of Lord Middleton—the inventor of the "Brodrick" cap. One had formerly been a guard on one of the northern railways—I think the North-Eastern. The fourth was my unfortunate self. Nearly every day the chair-owner would come worrying us, sometimes on his bicycle, sometimes walking, but always an object of laughter to the other men because he dressed in a dark cycling suit with loud golf stockings, and carried a leather bag in his hand —they presumed to hold our rents.

At home things were far from being peaceful or pleasant. We occupied a three-roomed flat. The windows of the front room had been broken by boys playing football in the street, and never repaired. The flat beneath us—we occupied the first floor—was let to a hawker who had five children. Some of these were crying most of the time, all of them some of the time; I never met with such children for weeping and wailing. I could not write a line for them. At night we were frequently awakened from our "beauty" sleep by drunken brawls, sometimes in the house, sometimes outside. Altogether, what with the

worry of "Stockings," or "Knickerbockers" (as the chair-owner was called), and the want of rest and quiet at home, I was getting dangerously near qualifying for a place at Hellingly. In fact, if I hadn't had an occasional deep drink I have no doubt but that I should have been there before now.

Things grew from worse to worse still. "Knickerbockers" threatened to stop the chair daily. I could not get a decent job. Often we had no dinner on week days, and just bread and cheese or ready-cooked bacon and bread on Sundays; to buy which I had to go out on Sunday mornings and earn the money. Clothes, boots, bed-clothes were in pawn, money borrowed on many of the tickets. In all our experience we never found things so difficult.

Then a change came. It is curious, but I kept thinking, as things grew worse and worse, "'Tis darkest just before the dawn." Perhaps people always think that, when troubles accumulate, whether there is any relief in store for them or not; but certainly this thought was often in my mind as I pondered over one thing and another.

One day I had had no work in the morning. In the afternoon it was very cold. I put my chair away early—my overcoat was in pawn—and went

to the Free Library, where I entered my name as being unemployed—which I was most of the time—hoping to be put on the relief work again. I expected to lose the chair every day. Having filled up the form provided, I sat at a side table for some time looking over guides to Victoria and other parts of British Columbia, wishing myself out there, where many members of my family have done well.

That night we had no money and nothing to eat. I tried to sell some books, but could get no one to buy them. The next morning was fine, and I took the books out with me to try to sell them again; failing, I left them in the coach-house and went out with the chair. I managed to get an hour early, which provided us with dinner and something for tea. Wishing to avoid "Knickerbockers," and hoping to earn something to give him in the afternoon, I took the chair up towards the Grand Hotel. I had been in the habit of standing near the railway station in Gildredge Road.

Before I went home to dinner a fellow chairman named West told me that a stranger had been inquiring for me. He said that he looked like a working-man, so I concluded that it was either some one to whom I owed some money or a Socialist from away.

After dinner I found that this stranger had been inquiring for me of other chair-men. I began to get interested and anxious, as I understood he had gone up to my chair on the parade to wait for me. So I hurried up to it, acquiring three halfpence-worth of Dutch courage at the Devonshire Park Restaurant *en passant*. When I reached the chair I found a tall, well-built elderly man sitting near it talking to a fellow chair-man with whom I have always been friendly, named Piper.

"Mick," he said, "here is a gentleman wants to see you."

("Mick," or "Mickie," corruptions of my surname, are what I am usually called by the other bath chair-men.)

"You don't know me, I suppose," the stranger said to me.

"No, I can't say that I do," I replied.

"Well, I'm a Meek," he said.

"Oh!" I replied. "From New Zealand?" I could see it was not my father's brother John, whose photograph I have had for some years. He used to pride himself upon his resemblance to Lord Roberts, and, of course, had a grey moustache. This man did not resemble Lord Roberts in the least. (I have seen and spoken to "Bobs," so I know.) For one thing he was tall

and broad-shouldered, and though he had a heavy moustache, it was not grey.

"No," he answered, "from Vancouver."

"Not Dick?" I exclaimed.

"Yes," he said, "I'm Dick."

"Well, I'm d——d!" I exclaimed. I hope my readers will forgive me, but I was completely surprised. I had not heard from my uncle Dick, my father's youngest brother, for over ten years, and he was about the last man I ever expected to see in England. It seems he had been staying at Hastings with a cousin of his for some time, purposing to look me up, but unable to communicate with me because he did not know my address. We sat talking for half-an-hour, I explaining how I was living, and telling him of my hopes (then growing very slender) from this book: he telling me of his life in British Columbia, and, while he did not lead me to think he was very well off himself, painting the life of working-people there in the most glowing colours.

While we sat there "Knickerbockers" came up and called me on one side.

"Have you any money for me?" he asked.

"No," I answered, "I have only earned 2s. 6d this week."

(This happened on a Thursday—Nov. 4th.)

"Very well," he said, "you take the chair home and hand me over the key of the coach-house."

"All right," I answered. I was not surprised, and, to tell the truth, I didn't much care.

"And look here," he said, "you will lose your licence in a day or two."

"That won't be a great loss," I retorted, and turning my back upon him I asked my uncle if he would walk down with me to the coach-house. On the way I told him what had happened, but I neither asked him to help me out of my trouble nor did I expect him to. He asked me if I could get a decent living if I had a chair of my own, but I told him that of late years the work had declined so much it was not worth troubling about. I tried to put the best face I could on it by explaining that I hoped to be put on the Corporation Relief Works. If I had but known, this uncle of mine, though he was not too well dressed, and certainly wore neither a knicker-bocker suit nor golf stockings, could have bought me half-a-dozen chairs—if I had wanted them and he had cared to.

We walked down to the coach-house, where I put the chair away and handed over the key in silence to its owner. From there we went to the "Rose and Crown," where we had a drink, for

which my uncle would not let me pay. Instead, he showed me some plaster work over the boot-maker's shop opposite which he had done himself some forty years before. And on the way home he showed me the house in East Street in which I was born and where he had last seen me.

When we reached home my little daughter, who had been in bed all day with the toothache, fell in love with him, and he with her. We had tea, he telling us of his early life in England, when I found I had many connections, aunts and cousins, of whom I had never heard before, here and at Hastings. When we got up from the table to go out my uncle said—

"I have a little present for you. Which shall I give it to?"

"You'd better give it to Kate," I answered. He put something into my wife's hand, which made her face light up and her eyes shine. I thought it was five, or perhaps ten, shillings. It was a sovereign.

We went for a walk together, then returning home my wife came out with us to accompany my uncle to the station. As we had plenty of time we took a walk round. Incidentally we called at "The Eagle" for drinks, and my uncle told the landlord that he used to fre-

quent the selfsame tavern nearly forty years before when he was helping to build St. Saviour's Church steeple. "We used to call it," he said, "'wetting the Eagle's wings.'" "We," I said, "have a shorter term for it. We call it 'feeding the bird.'" "The Eagle" is one of the cleanest and best conducted houses in the town.

He went away to Hastings, promising to write to us. He had said—I thought only in fun—that he wanted Milly to go back to Vancouver with him. We were to follow, I understood, as soon as the returns from this work would enable us to pay our passages out. The next day I paid the chair-owner four shillings, and he let me have the chair again on the understanding that I should pay him another four on the following Monday morning. During the next three days I only earned four shillings, so I went to his office to tell him I could not pay him then, but as I knew I should have ten shillings on the Tuesday, I would pay him then. He refused to wait another day, so I handed him over the key.

So we were both out of work again. I had sent this book some time before to its publishers, and slender as my hopes of its success were, they

began to grow from the fact that it had not been returned. So I wrote to Messrs. Constable and Mr. Wells asking whether anything was being arranged. My uncle had sent us a post-card asking if we were getting the girl ready to go back with him.

On the Tuesday I had the ten shillings I expected. On the Wednesday I heard that the book was to be published. On the Thursday my uncle came to see us again. This time he gave us two pounds, and definitely arranged to take Milly back with him. I did not know then upon what terms my book would be published, and we thought it better for her to go than to stay with us and face the hardships we expected this winter. He offered to take my wife as well, but she did not like the idea of leaving me behind alone. If I could have raised twenty pounds, he said, he could have taken us all! And had he known a month earlier how we were situated, he would have sent home for the money.

A good part of the two pounds was spent upon things for the journey we expected Milly to have to take; but on the following Tuesday I found that I should have an ample allowance during the winter months to enable me to finish this work and correct the proofs. We decided,

therefore, that it would be better for Milly to stay and go out with us in the spring. So I went to Hastings in the afternoon and communicated this good news to my uncle, who, while I think he regretted the little one was not going back with him, admitted that it would be best. He arranged to send passes for all of us as soon as he got home and could get one of his houses ready for us to go into when we got there.

I do not know even now exactly how he is situated. He told us that he had worked a great many years, a great part of the time in the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, and that while he had not been compelled to deny himself, he had been able, by avoiding reckless waste, and by judiciously investing his savings in real estate in the vicinity of Vancouver City, to acquire sufficient to live upon comfortably without any longer being compelled to work. He assured me I should find no difficulty in obtaining suitable employment out there. "And," he said, "if you don't you will never want while I live."

It had been arranged that I should meet Mr. Wells and Mr. T. Seccombe—a member of the firm of publishers who are responsible for this book—at Spier's and Pond's Central Restaurant

on the Wednesday to discuss details. As it happened my uncle was leaving for Liverpool on the same date, so I joined him at Polegate and we travelled up together, my wife and Milly going to Polegate with me to bid him *au revoir*. Arrived at London Bridge we made our way through the throngs waiting to see the Kings of England and Portugal pass through the City to Ludgate Circus. Here we found Mr. Seccombe, but my uncle could not wait to see Mr. Wells, who was a few minutes late, as he was anxious to get on to Euston. I was sorry Mr. Wells missed this typical pioneer of Empire.

We had an exceedingly plain but substantial and enjoyable lunch, which occupied us two hours. I had no thought for the crowds of people lunching around us. So much had happened in so short a time, and there were these two gentlemen talking, talking, and I did not wish to miss a word. Something seemed to have made Mr. Wells particularly happy—although he chaffed Mr. Seccombe unmercifully in his rôle as publisher, he beamed on both of us. We had lager beer in pint jugs, roast beef and potatoes, apple tart with cream, cheese. Then my two hosts tossed to see who was to

pay. Mr. Wells won, but insisted on paying. He said a new rule had been introduced, by which the winner instead of the loser paid; so Mr. Seccombe insisted upon another toss.

Then Mr. Wells had to leave us to keep an appointment. Mr. Seccombe took me along Fleet Street in search of the Outer Temple, where he wished to see Mr. F. J. Green, the secretary of the International Arbitration Society and Socialist Candidate for Bristol. Though Mr. Walter Jerrold, a grandson of the author of *Mrs. Caudle's Curtain Lectures*, directed us, we found some difficulty in finding this place, and when we did we had so many stairs to climb I thought they would never end. Afterwards, tea in a Fleet Street shop, where in discussing the events of the past few weeks they sounded so much like the conventional ending to a conventional story that Mr. Seccombe agreed with me in thinking my readers would consider them too strange to be true.

But all I have narrated in this epilogue, as all I have written in this book, is true. It is, the whole of it, a true story, told as plainly and simply as I could find English to tell it in. Here I am sitting in a decent quiet house, with

every necessary provided for, with no worry, and the prospect of a hopeful and useful future.

Mr. Seccombe had to deliver a lecture at an institution near Chancery Lane. He invited me to attend it, but I felt a burning desire to get away by myself and *think;* besides, I was anxious to get away home as quickly as possible. On parting, Mr. Wells had said—

"Now I suppose you will enjoy yourself in town to-night?"

"No," I answered; "I shall jolly well get out of it as quick as I can."

I had become unfamiliar with London and its ways after having been away from it so long, and I found some difficulty in making my way back to London Bridge. It was over twenty minutes before I dared venture across Blackfriars Road: there was a slight drizzle, the streets were wet, and I was nervous. However, I managed it at last, in time to catch one of the slowest of the Brighton Company's slow trains.

I have since arranged with my landlord to let me have a quieter house to work in. I have hired another chair for a month, as I did not wish to spend all my time over the fire, but I should have been wiser had I kept the money in

my pocket; a fortnight of the month has elapsed and I have had only one job with it. I am not hiring any more bath chairs or paying any more chair rent—if I can help it. "Enough," the late E. F. Fay used to say, "is almost as good as a feast." I have had enough bath chair work to last me all this life, and if there is any truth in the Pythagorean theory, through half-a-dozen more. I have every reason to believe that I never need know want again such as I have known in the past. Just as it seemed that I, and those dependent upon me, were about to sink once for all, there were hands stretched out willing and anxious to help us; first those of my unexpected, unthought of uncle, then Mr. Wells and my publishers. Just as the scene had reached its very blackest and for us all to go to the workhouse seemed only a matter of days, ways opened and all became light.

Time alone can prove whether or not I can succeed as a writer of fiction or an essayist. I am content to wait its verdict. But I do, in any case, look forward with the pleasantest anticipations to our journey to the Sunny West, to the ride through the glorious Rockies, and the home awaiting us, where hopeless, abject poverty such as surrounds us here is, as yet, unknown, to the

near kindred I have not seen for so many years and whom I have longed to see.

* * * * *

I have not lost my licence as a bath chair-man —my nineteenth consecutive one—though it is no longer of much value to me, so that "Stockings" has proved a false prophet. I am afraid that if I suggested any means by which the lot of the poor bath chair-man could be lightened, those responsible would not listen to me. "No prophet is without honour save in his own country." Here, however, are a few suggestions.

Having limited the number of licensed chairs, and thus given them a monopoly value, the Watch Committee have no right to license an unlimited number of men. By doing so they place them entirely in the power of the chair-owners, who, though they know very well that there is not half the money to be earned with them that there used to be, and that the men cannot possibly pay their rent and live, still charge the same rent they did fourteen or fifteen years ago. Supposing some of the men do drink: I doubt if any self-respecting man could feel himself in the clutches of some of these merciless bloodsuckers without taking to drink or going mad.

The chairs are necessary in a town like Eastbourne. They are a useful public service, and the town would be less prosperous without them. It is not to the interest of any community that any of its useful workers should live unhealthy lives, and men who live in continuous worry and want cannot live healthy ones. Bath chairs will always be needed—till we get aerial ones; but thank goodness I've done with them!

THE END

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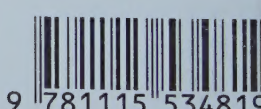

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